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TALES THAT ASTONISHED

#3

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Christmas Special!

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Batman! Sexton Blake!

The Spirit! Box of Delights!

British Annuals from 1980!

2000AD! Fleetway! DC

Thomson! TV Avengers!

X-Men! And more ...

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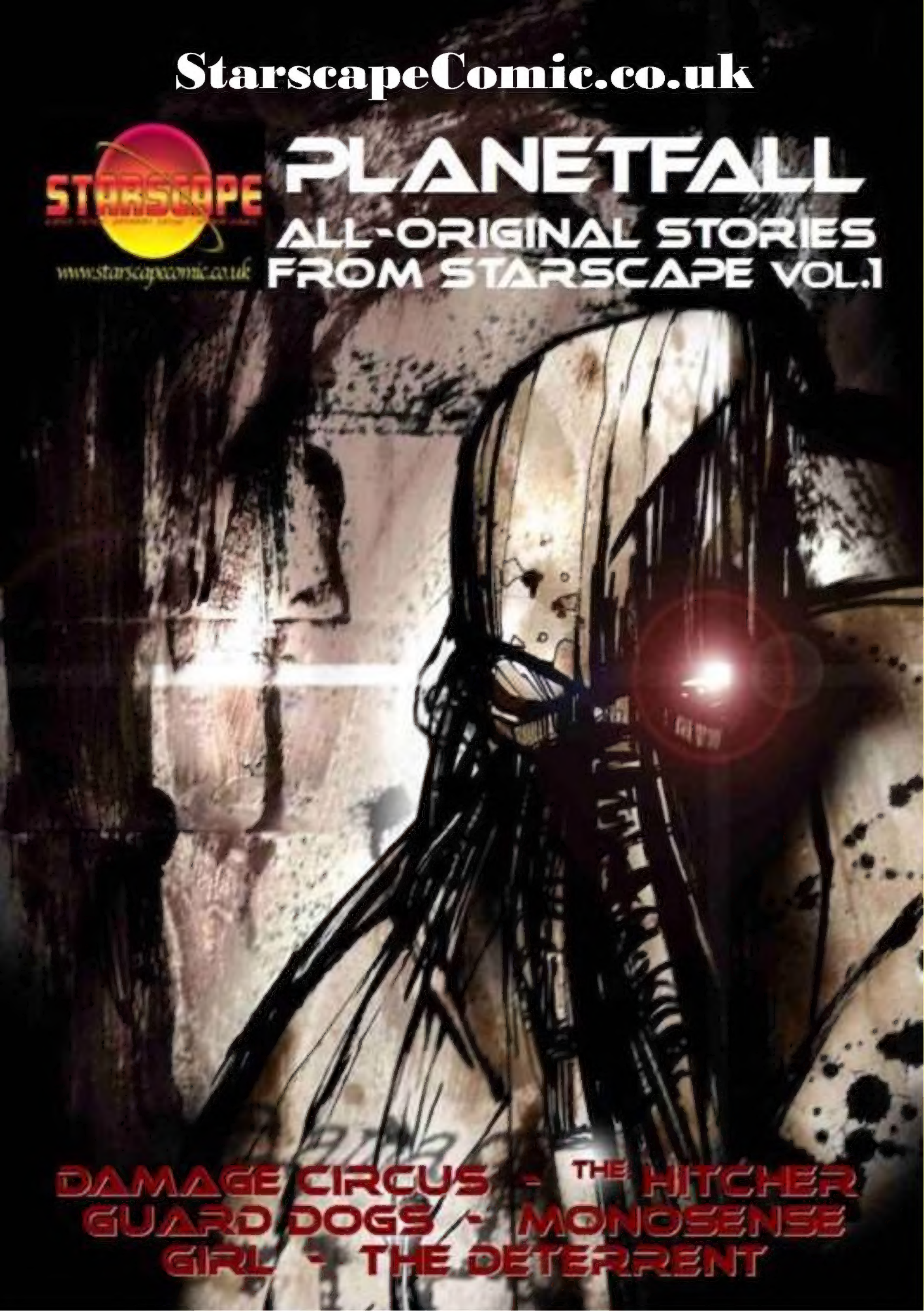
PLANETFALL

ALL-ORIGINAL STORIES FROM STARSCAPE VOL.1



DAMAGE CIRCUS - THE HITCHER
GUARD DOGS - MONOSENSE
GIRL - THE DETERRENT

Tales That Astonished is in an A5 format and can be printed without distortion on home printers and read easily on PCs, laptops,

STARSCAPE SAYS...

Calling all Starkids!

Merry Christmas from all at TALES THAT ASTONISHED.

In this super-sized issue, we concentrate on memories of our writers, fans and compatriots. For most of us in the UK, except Vince, Christmas was a magical time, in which there was a plethora of annuals – big hardbacked books. Also, with the tradition of the comics being weekly, there were plenty of snowscaped covers and festive-themed fun. Let's dip into it.

Reach me at tta@starscapecomicuk Until then...

Keep watching the stars!

Chris Smillie
(Starchief)

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Christmas Crackers from our guest contributors.

Jeff Bowers, noted contributor to comicbookplus.com offers a thought on Barks' Christmas on Bear Mountain.

Vince Ranaldi, collector and all-round good guy, suggests a Christmas X-Men tale and a mood lifting, classic newspaper strip.

Greg, hero contributor on comicbookplus.com, makes his Dark Knight favourite a must read.

John McShane, comics historian and Eisner expert, suggests an atmospheric, touching tale.

Gavin Porteous, friend, techspert and coffee lover, goes all nostalgic.

paw broon delves back with the other Great Detective and a Christmas mystery.

Steve Montgomery returns every year to the ghostly goings on at St Frank's School.

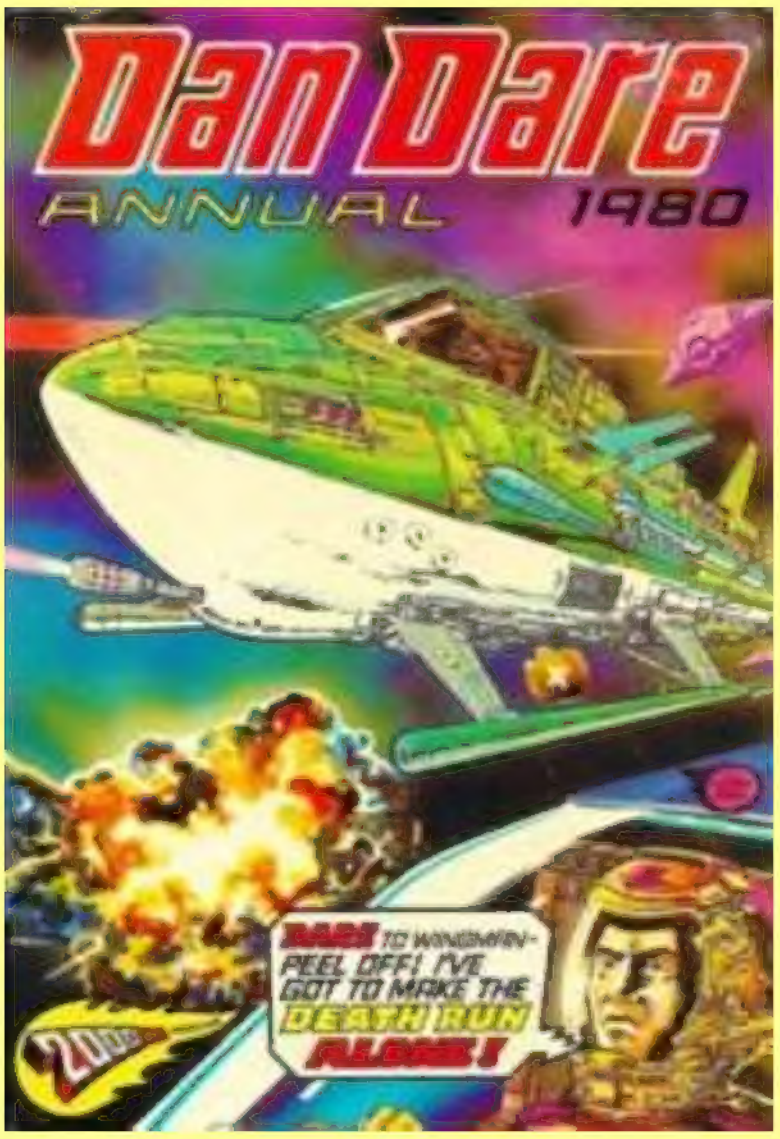
Our esteemed editor refuses to reveal his festive favourite. What a party pooper! But it may well be from 1980!

A Very 1980 Christmas I

by Chris Smillie

In Britain, we have a strong tradition of Christmas Annuals. These are very different to the DC / Marvel comics of the US, which are basically slightly longer issues. No, the UK had (and still has) hardback books of over a hundred pages. It truly made Christmas magical for comic-mad kids. Writing this in 2024, 1980 was 45 years ago, as they were actually released a few months earlier in 1979, so they could be ready for the Xmas stocking.

I have split this section into the three main comic publishers in Britain at that time: IPC Fleetway, DC Thomson and Marvel UK. Both Fleetway and DCT produced both action and humour (and others), so let's taste both, whilst I've separated out the 2000AD stable. I'll look at three annuals of each to give a flavour.



Published by Fleetway, 2000AD was evolving into something quite different. Strangely enough, I have decided not to look at the 2000AD annual, but a series of spin-offs available then.

DAN DARE was the lynchpin of early Tooth, being a resurrection

(although a very different character) of the 1950s Eagle lead story. His Hell Planet story in 1977 was outstanding (see TTA #2) and led to him being the cover star of the 2000AD 1978 Annual. He then followed that with the Return of the Mekon and a wonderful outer space saga with a motley collection of characters aboard the starship Eagle. This led to the first DD Annual of 1979 (released the year earlier of course).

By 1979, Dare had been dropped at the end of the saga, where he drifted on the remains of his exploded ship. He then turned up in a below average Servant of Evil series. So underwhelming that it was allowed to drift away unfinished.

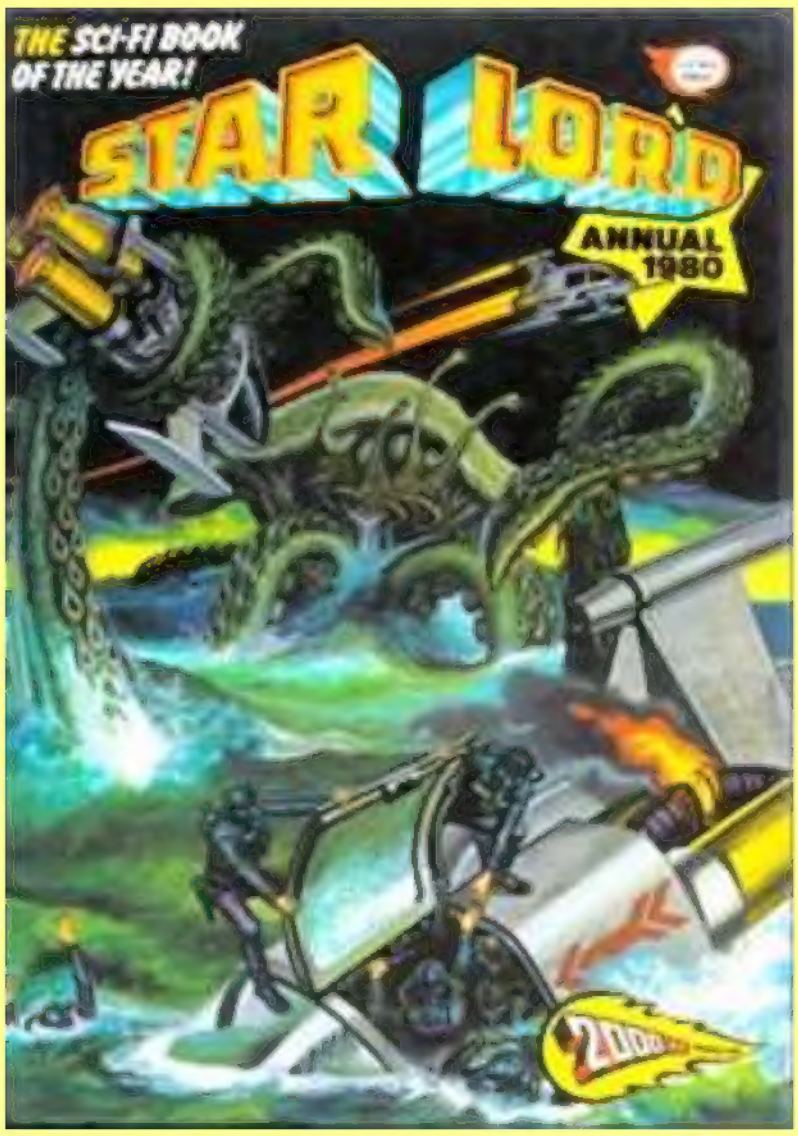
It's, then, a little surprising to see Dare get a 1980 Annual. As we will see, resurrecting old comics was not unusual, as it was all about brand recognition for the parents, not the children.

SERVING OFFICERS OF THE T.A.S.A. STARFLEET WERE THE BEST PILOTS IN THE GALAXY. BETWEEN COMMISSIONS THEY WERE ALLOWED TO HIRE THEMSELVES OUT TO PRIVATE SPACE CRAFT OPERATORS— WHICH IS HOW VETERAN SPACE FIGHTER DAN DARE CAME TO BE WRESTLING WITH THE CONTROLS OF AN ANCIENT FREIGHTER TO ATTEMPT A VERY DANGEROUS RE-ENTRY TO THE TRADING WORLD CYBALLE 9.
FREAK METEOR STORM! GOTTA TAKE MANUAL CONTROL— COMPUTER CAN'T HANDLE IT!
YOU'RE INSANE DARE— NOBODY CAN MAKE A MANUAL LANDING ON ONE OF THESE SHIPS!

The cover by Kev O'Neill is decent enough. Not staggeringly good, but not a turn off either. As ever, the content is a mix of text and stories. The text comprises of written stories

and plenty of articles about space. A mix of the good, bad and indifferent. Surprisingly, there is only one DD story! In it, Dan, struggling to find work, takes a commission to fight a pirate ship. His co-pilot turns out to be the wolf-like Rok – a meat-hungry alien he met during Return of the Mekon. It turns out the leader of the pirates is also acquainted with Dan. Generally, the story is okay but nothing more. It was Dan Dare by numbers.

Dare also turned up in a festive **Judge Dredd** tale – if you can imagine such a thing. Indeed, Dare is not the only guest star. All the great and the good from 2000AD and Star*Lord are in here. The tale is actually pretty funny, although a casual reader would probably have no idea what all these in-jokes are. The art by Keith Page is a real let-down. Nevertheless. Page eventually became a much more accomplished artist for Commando, so let's put that down to a lack of experience.

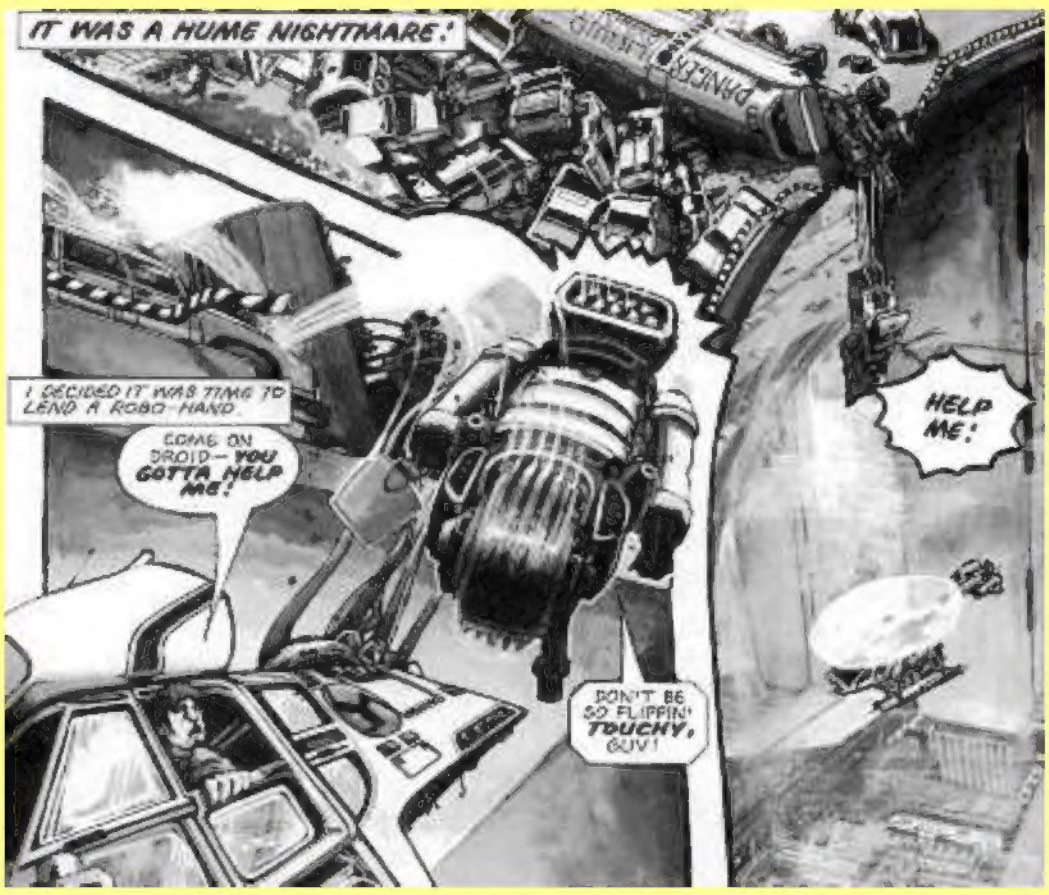


Elsewhere, Fleetway continued its policy of recycling old stories, bringing in UFO Agent and Rick Random from the Fifties. And they did look very out-of-place and old-fashioned. Much better, were the standalone future shock-style stories.

Next up is the **STAR*LORD** Annual. This was a terrific comic that merged into 2000AD in 1978

– even though Star*Lord was the bigger seller! 1980 was the second annual and announced itself as 'the sci-fi book of the year!' Unfortunately, it was another poor affair. Nevertheless, it must have sold well enough as there was a final annual in 1981.

The stalwarts of **Strontium Dog** **TimeQuake** and **Ro-Jaws** (from Ro-Busters, which evolved into the ABC Warriors) were present, although by very different creative teams. SD is pretty psychedelic, whilst Ro-Jaws has some wonderful perspectives. The rest of the annual is, though, filled with outdated stories featuring the likes of Captain Condor and Jimmi From Jupiter. The annual bears pretty much no relation to the out standing comic.


IT WAS A HUME NIGHTMARE!
I DECIDED IT WAS TIME TO LEND A ROBO-HAND.
COME ON DROID— YOU GOTTA HELP ME!
HELP ME!
DON'T BE SO FLIPPIN' TOUCHY, GUV!

Finally, there is the **TORNADO** Annual. An odd merger with 2000AD earlier in 1979, the comic was a boys' adventure, more similar to Valiant or Lion. Still, all those had ceased, so there was nowhere else to go. That said, I enjoyed Tornado a lot and was disappointed to see it disappear. **The Angry Planet** was

one of Fleetway's finest sci-fi stories, whilst **BlackHawk** – an outstanding black slave-to-Roman centurion – transferred across but became a ridiculous gladiator-in-space knockabout, complete with funny aliens.

As with the other annuals, the majority was archaic reprints, although there were some more recent, especially Battle's **Terror Behind The Bamboo Curtain**. However, I wanted to read Tornado stories. Only two characters from the comic actually appeared.

One was the **Mind of Wolfie Smith**, which was a reasonable enough story and art, whilst the other was **Victor Drago**. Given this was originally Sexton Blake (see articles in this issue), it seems that some old strip was simply retitled, as it bears no relation to the atmospheric strip in the comic.

VICTOR DRAGO
and the CURSE of GRAVEWAYS ABBEY
A cold January wind howled round London, rattling window-panes and driving a fine curtain of rain before it. In his Baker Street flat, ace detective Victor Drago and his cockney assistant Spencer had just settled down to supper when there was a knock on the door.
I WONDER WHO THAT CAN BE, SPENCER? IT MUST BE SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO SEE ME PRETTY BADLY.
RAT-TAT!
I'LL SAY SO, IN WEATHER LIKE THIS, GUV.!

Overall, then, although the 2000AD 1980 Annual is something to be read again and again, the spin-offs did nothing to satisfy fans of these comics and characters.

None of your soppy, all's well that ends well, bring a tear to a glass eye stuff in this exceptional adventure for Steed and Mrs Peel.

An evil Santa; stolen government secrets; a nasty set of psychics; a Dickens themed Christmas party; Steed being got at via bad dreams; a big old country house which Steed seems to recognise; weird, disturbing dream sequences.

None of your sentimental seasonal slush here. Steed's in big trouble but, fortunately, Mrs Peel has an inkling that there's something seriously amiss.

One of the great Avengers episodes and the black and white presentation just adds to the atmosphere and mystery. Search it out, watch it, be entertained.

Not your usual Christmas fare, simply superb.

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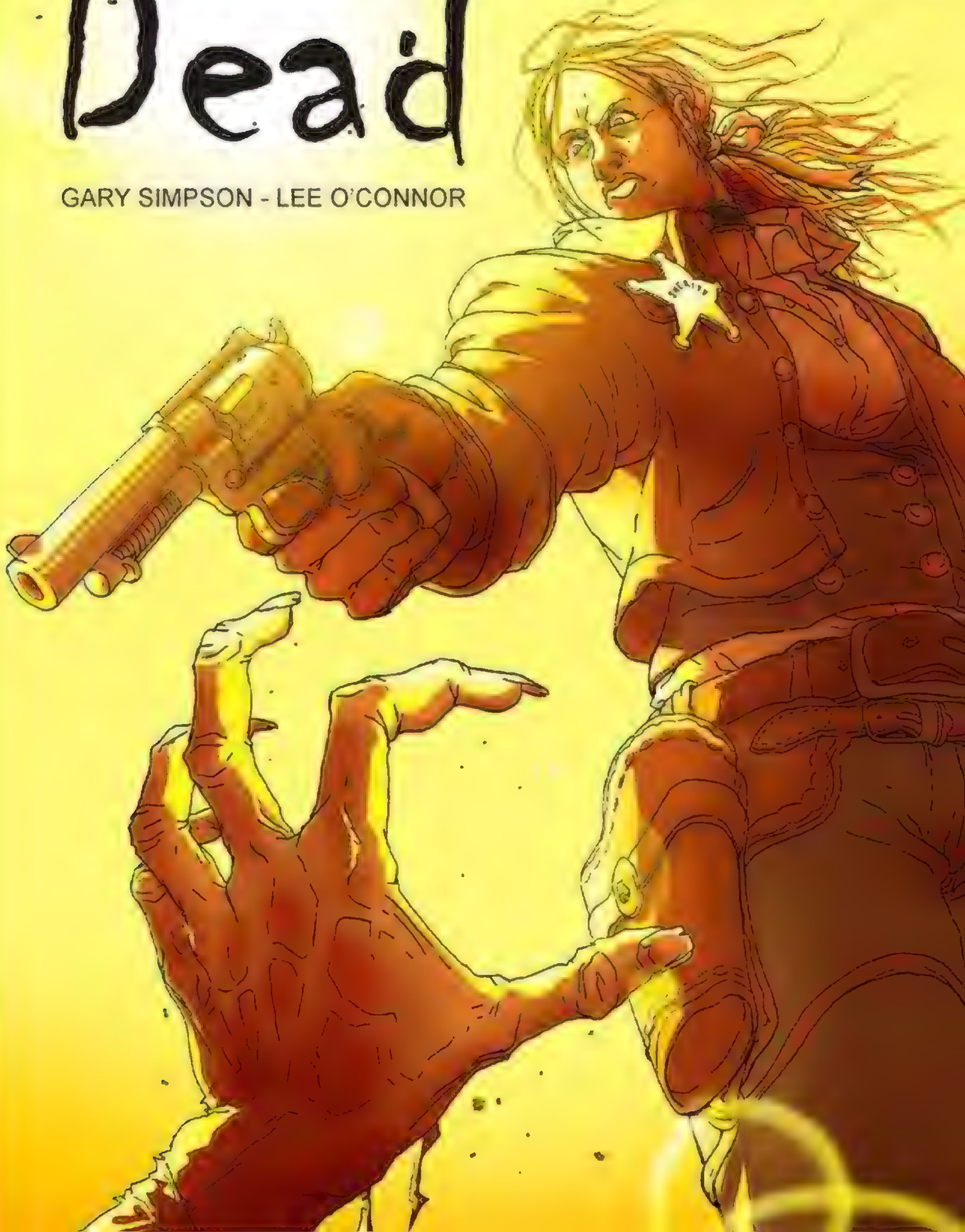
$2.99 (US)

Dead

GARY SIMPSON - LEE O'CONNOR



In the Spirit of Christmas

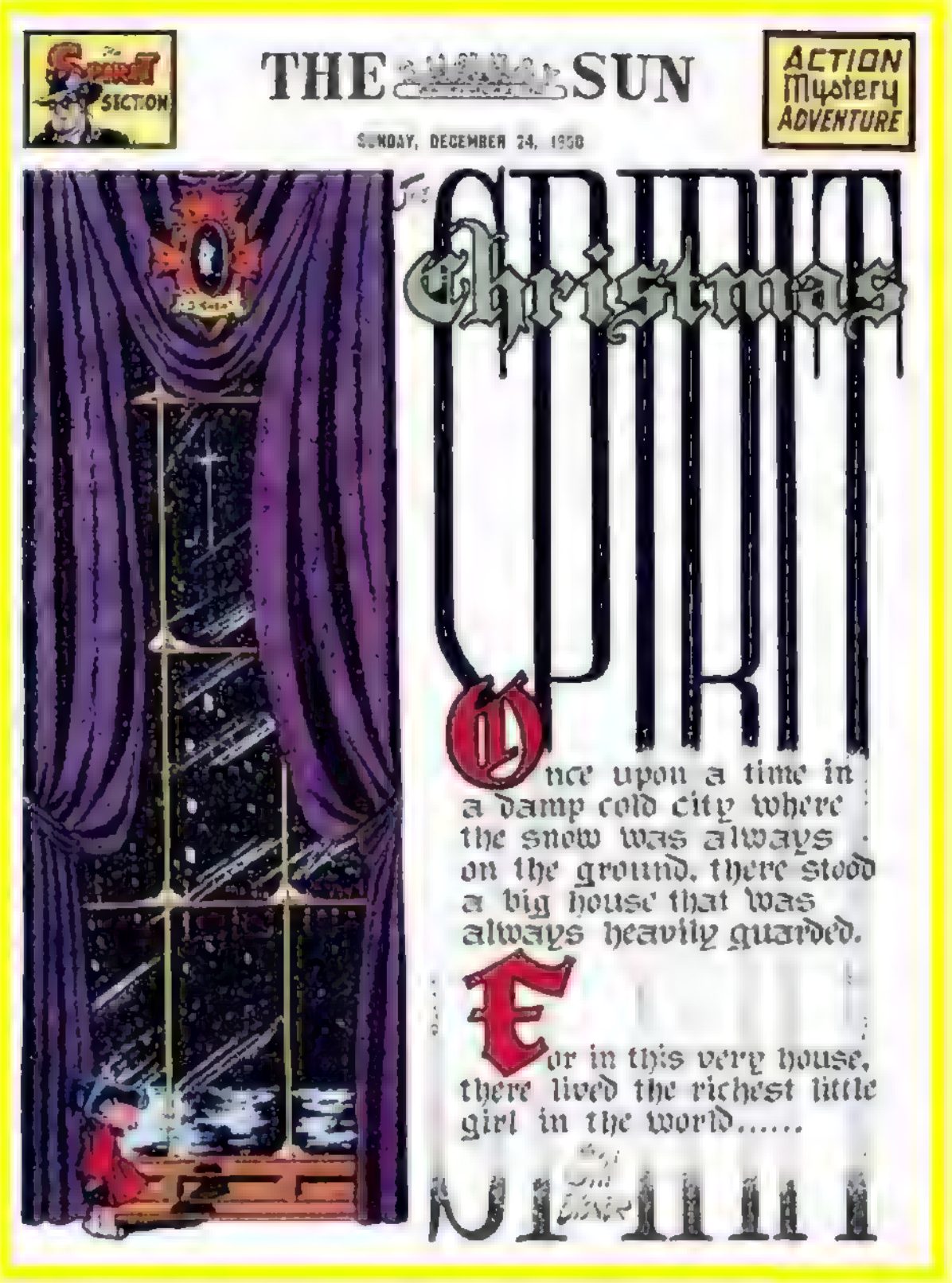
by John McShane

Shmuel (Sam) Eisner loved Viennese café society and its inspiring conversations. Sam was employed in Vienna as a muralist. Mainly, he decorated Vienna's Roman Catholic churches, as we can see from the chapter entitled Vienna 1910 in his son's graphic novel, To The Heart of the Storm. Sam was certainly no bigot. And he left Vienna for New York just in time to… well, save his life.

"For me the Christmas holiday celebrated by the western world never had any religious significance," wrote Will Eisner in 1994 for Denis Kitchen's collection of Will's Christmas stories. "I viewed it as a popularized commemoration of an event rooted in deep significance for Christianity that had lost much of its religious character. Over the years it became, in effect, a national holiday celebrated as a secular event in every nation of western society."

Will noted that "even those whose religion forbade it, allowed themselves to be caught up in the spirit [sic] and join in."

There are in total 9 of these Christmas Spirits. They start in 1941 and 1942. Then Will was called up to military service (as were Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and many others). The stories recommenced from 1945-1951. After this, Will left the Spirit behind for other projects.


The Spirit Section
THE SUN
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1950
ACTION Mystery ADVENTURE
Christmas
SPIRIT
Once upon a time in a damp cold city where the snow was always on the ground, there stood a big house that was always heavily guarded.
For in this very house, there lived the richest little girl in the world.....

Each story typically revolves around Eisner's most famous character encountering various characters facing hardship during the holiday season: poverty (Black Henry and Simple Simon end up giving back all the money they have stolen from the Paupers National Bank), loneliness (the Tramps' tales), injustice (Basher Bains escapes from prison, but ends up helping with money to cure a kid's blindness). This fraught holiday season can be both a time of joy and fellowship, but also a time for reckoning with societal challenges. Eisner focuses on redemption, compassion, and social justice.

The Christmas Spirit is both a festive piece (the readers are all wished a Merry Christmas at the end of each episode) and a commentary on humanity, making it a memorable part of Eisner's legacy.

The Spirit
by Will Eisner
IT IS CHRISTMAS EVE.. WILDWOOD CEMETERY SLUMBERS UNDER A BLANKET OF FRESHLY FALLEN SNOW.
AH LIKE CHRISTMUS EVE... EV'YONE IN TOWN SHO' LOOK HAPPY... HO HUM... AH'M TIRED, MIST' SPIRIT!..
SO AM I... WE'VE HAD A TOUGH DAY SHOPPING... GIVING GIFTS TO ALL THE CHARITY ORGANIZATIONS. YAWWWWWN....

Here is that intro panel for the story featuring Black Henry and Simple Simon

From The Baltimore Sun, the final panel of the 1950 Spirit Christmas section.

SEXTON BLAKE

by paw broon

THE MAN WHO KIDNAPPED FATHER CHRISTMAS
CHRISTMAS - AND SEXTON BLAKE AND TINKER THINK THEY ARE GOING TO ENJOY A HOLIDAY FREE FROM WORK BUT - - -
IT'S A GRAND TIME, CHRISTMAS, ISN'T IT, GUVNOR!
YES - ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU HAVE NO WORK TO DO!
GET IN THE CAR - - - AND STOP LIVELY - - - OR ELSE - - -
LOOK! GOT YOUR POLICE WHISTLE, TINKER? BLOW IT!

A rollicking, exciting, festive story starring the great detective, Sexton Blake and his assistant, Tinker.

The tale was featured in the Knockout Fun Book, 1947. Atmospheric, snowy, pre-Christmas street scenes lead the reader straight into the mystery as a Santa is kidnapped at gun point. Fortunately, Blake and Tinker are on hand to raise the alarm. The thrills and spills that follow include fights, guns, an aeroplane chase, a ski run to equal anything Bond would do decades later and a resolution as Blake defeats the gangsters and releases Father Christmas.

This is laid out in the strange format which mixes word balloons and text boxes, a look which was common in old British comics and annuals.

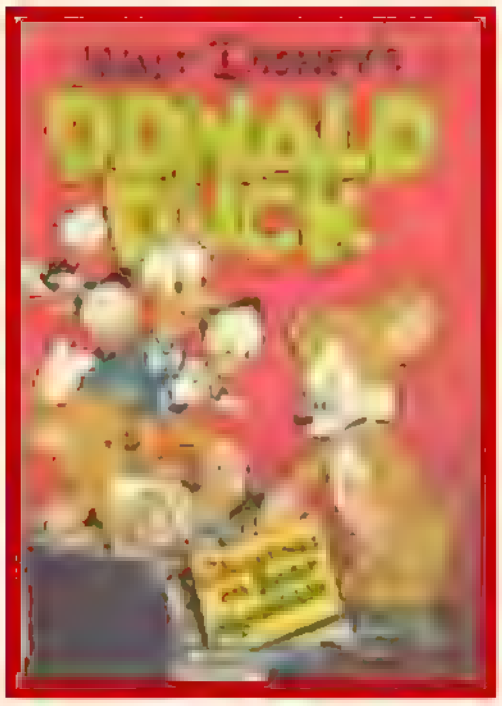
The art was by A.H. (Andrew) Taylor, one of the main artists on Sexton Blake strips in The Knockout. The writer is unidentified but as Taylor regularly worked with both Edward Holmes and Percy Blake, there is a good chance that one of those two scripted this fast-moving festive feature. Should you wish to experience the non-stop action, it is available here: https://comicbookplus.com/?dlid=69729

A real, old fashioned Christmas treat.

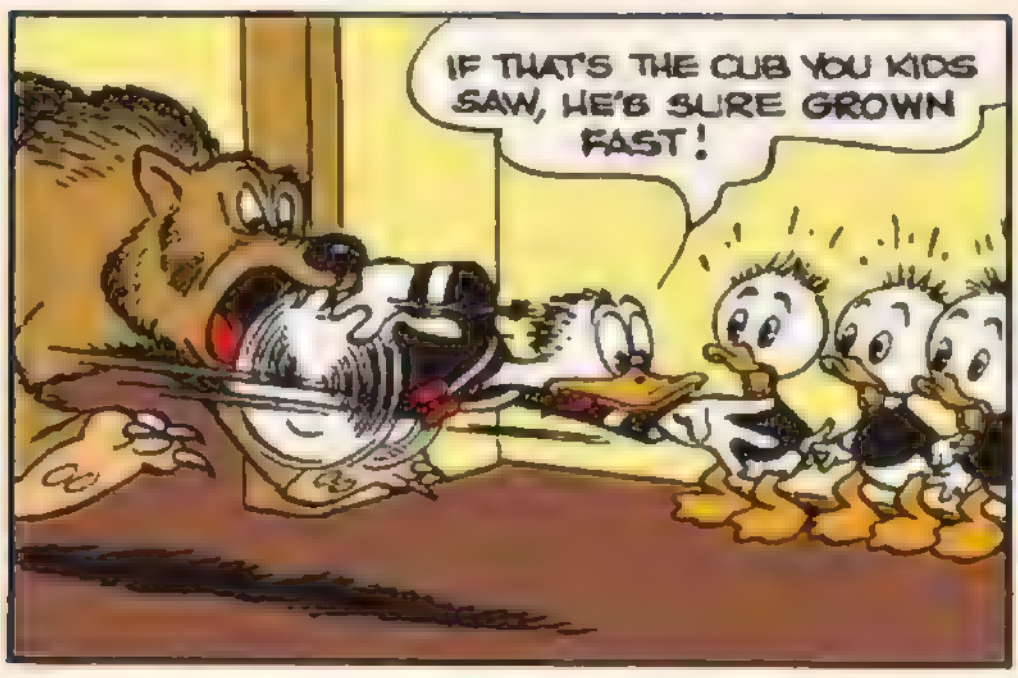
*(Blake made a belated comeback in 1979 in a snowy, wintry, cracker of a story in **Tornado** #1. But due to copyright problems he was now Victor Drago. Tinker and Pedro are now Spencer and Brutus. Story by Bill Henry and superbly, atmospherically illustrated by Mike Dorey. The Grey Panther becomes The Silver Lady, but you can't keep a classic car down and later it is referred to as The Grey Panther with the number plate, SB 192, giving the show away}*

Christmas on Bear Mountain

by Jeff Bowers



When I was kindly invited to contribute a few words about my favourite Christmas comic, I didn't need to even think about it. Without a doubt, it has to be Dell Four-Color #178, the story is "Christmas on Bear Mountain". I found a coverless issue in a charity shop. It was tucked away in a "grab bag" bundle of a dozen comics wrapped with twine. You had to take a chance on what you'd get, but it only cost ten cents. Since the average price of a comic at that time was ten cents, it seemed to be a good deal to me!



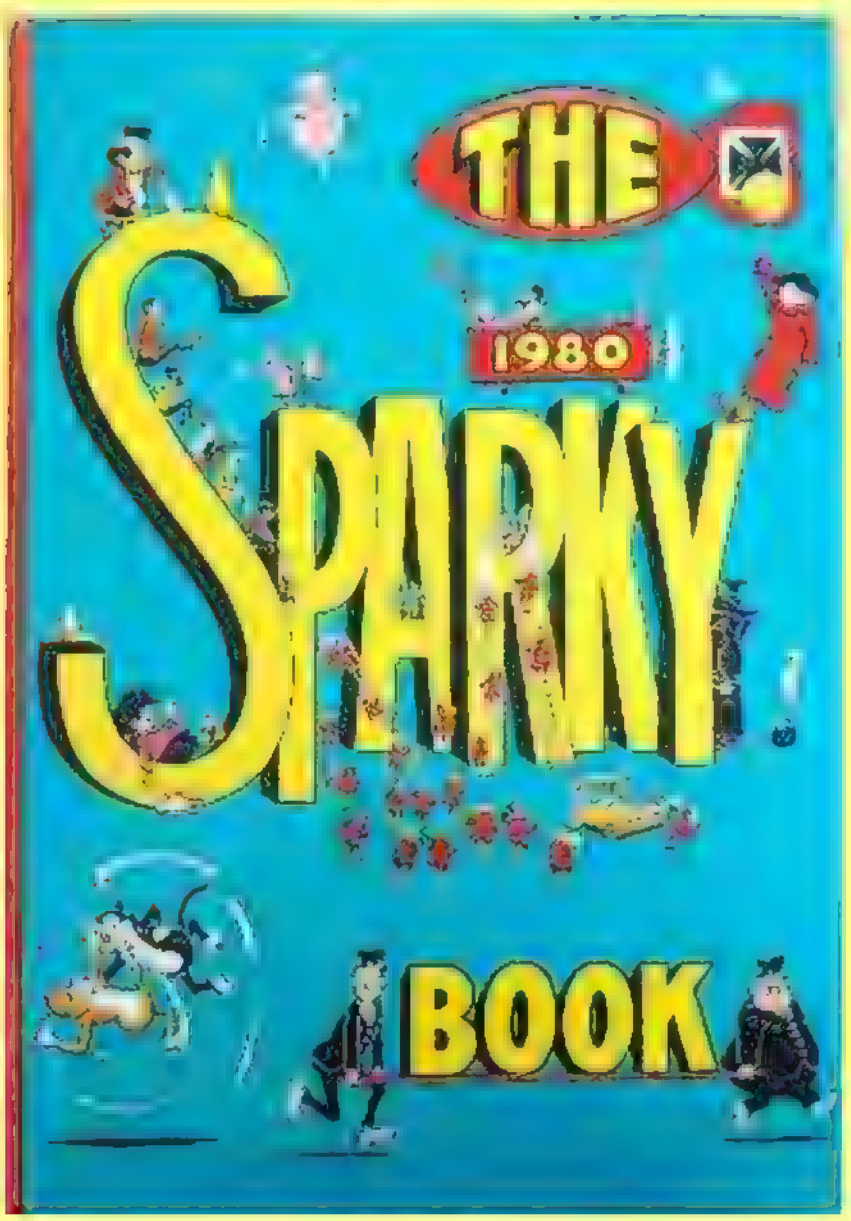
This story was Scrooge McDuck's debut, and he was quite a nasty character, playing a Christmas prank on Don and the boys. This story is a comedy of errors as Scrooge's prank blows up on him, but all ends well. I've read this to all my granddaughters every Christmas and they never tired of it! Or maybe they just liked the hot chocolate...

A Very 1980 Christmas II

by Chris Smillie

DC Thomson

DCT have a very special place in British comic history. The Beano is still being published, despite beginning in 1938!! Given it's a weekly, rather than a monthly, it massively outstrips Superman's Action Comics in terms of number of issues. That said, I always preferred the Defenders to the Avengers. The Justice Society to the Justice League. Star*Lord to 2000AD. The same with DCT, so I never religiously bought the Beano and the Dandy.



The humour annual I have chosen from 1980 is **THE SPARKY BOOK**. DCT always called their annuals 'books'. Seems a reasonable idea when you think about it. The Sparky originated as a younger children's comic in 1965. The character Sparky was unfortunately a throwback to an earlier view of a black child, complete with war-mask and bone through the nose – all the time whilst living in a modern (for the time) housing estate. That said, his race or tribal

appearance was never really mentioned, nor any direct racism applied. It was more clumsy and well-intentioned than hateful.

By the time 1980 had rolled around, Sparky had been dead as a standalone comic for around three years, having merged with the Topper in 1977. Nevertheless, it was a title parents recognised, so was worthy of an annual. By this time, Sparky had ditched the younger children's stuff to be a slightly quirkier comic – maybe more similar to Fleetway than most of DCT's humour.

The annual consisted mainly of repeated characters running through the comic. One of these was **The Sparky People**. These were the supposed publishing team of the comic. It may seem a little strange that kids were reading about a team of adults, complete with pipe-smoking editor, producing the comic, but I enjoyed it immensely. I do wonder, however, if the characters were inspired by the real-life team behind the scenes?

Aladdin had his genie, well the children of Sparky Town had **Mr Bubbles**. Rather than rubbing a lamp, here, one simply squeezed a washing-up bottle and out popped the soap-bubble spook, who would grant the squeezer the traditional three wishes. The last strip was the most fun with Barry asking to have a go on all the rides of the funfair. Having his second wish to be superstrong, he then decides to be taken on a rocket to Mars to escape from the coconut-shy stallholder, when his super-strength goes awry. After meeting evil Martians, Barry's friend Paul is granted three wishes, the final being that he wishes this all had never happened. Back they go, getting chased out of the funfair.

Perhaps the most popular strip was **I Spy**. Dressed in a black trench coat and trilby hat, I Spy took on nefarious crooks using a variety of secret devices hidden inside his costume. For old-timers, think *The Cloak* from **Wham!** For the younger generation, think a more sinister Inspector Gadget.

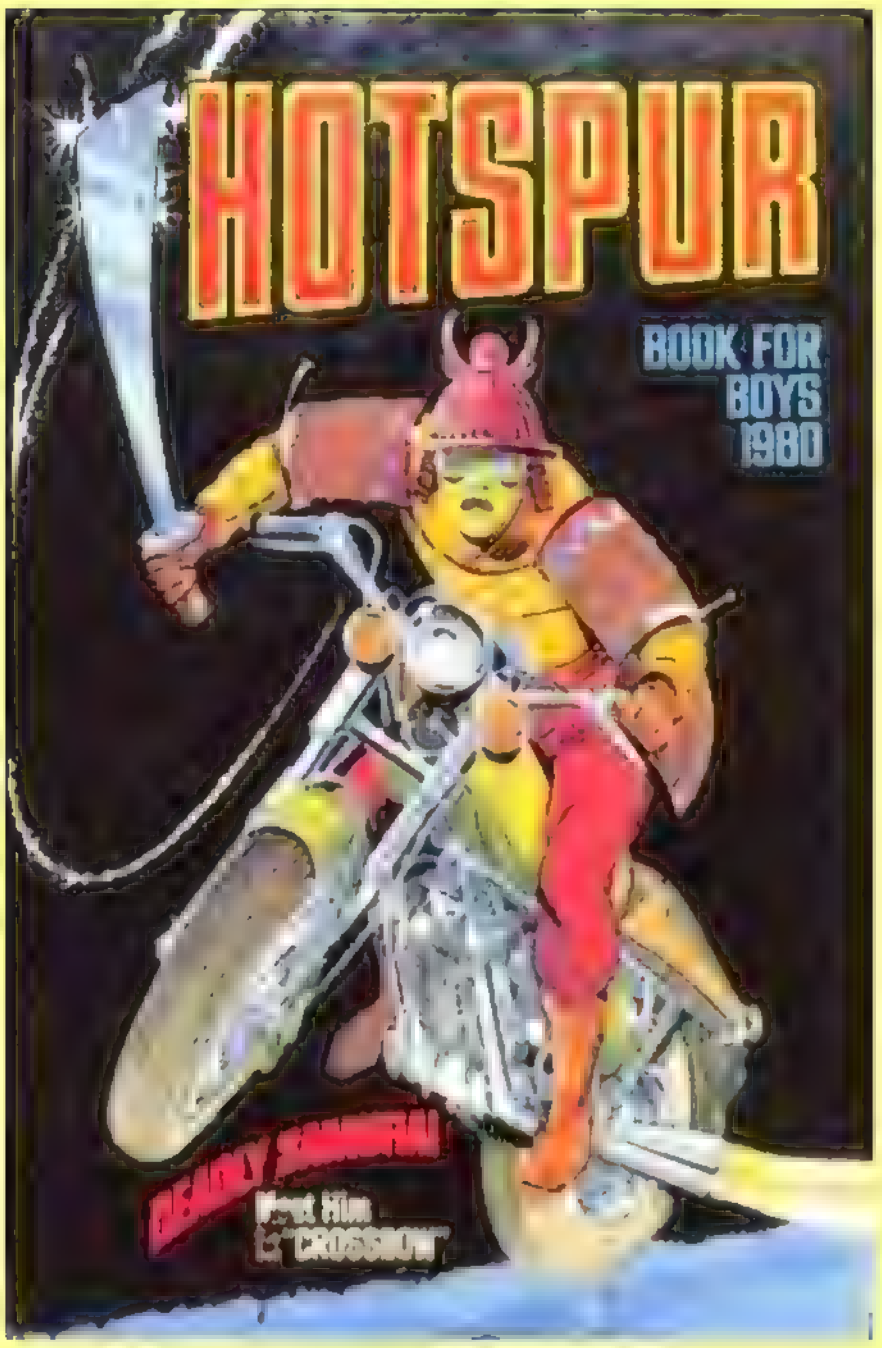
My favourite (by far) was **Spoofer McGraw**, who was basically a liar! Spoofer's friend, the parka-suited Bo, would ask him what such-and-such meant. Rather than own up to not knowing, Spoofer would make up some ridiculous tall tale, which Bo would often follow through with. In one, Spoofer convinces Bo that the whirligig for drying clothes is actually the final stage of a bicycle-powered underground laundry.

Sparky also had various adventure strips , such as the cosmic joker, **The Juggler** and the Tarzan-inspired **Bushboy**. In previous years, mixing adventure with humour was standard, but by 1980, adventure comics would have the odd humour strip but there was little room for adventure in the likes of the Beano. All-in-all, Sparky 1980 was a pretty satisfying read, even though the old favourite of **Thingummyblob** was absent.

Next up was **THE HOTSPUR BOOK FOR BOYS 1980**. This

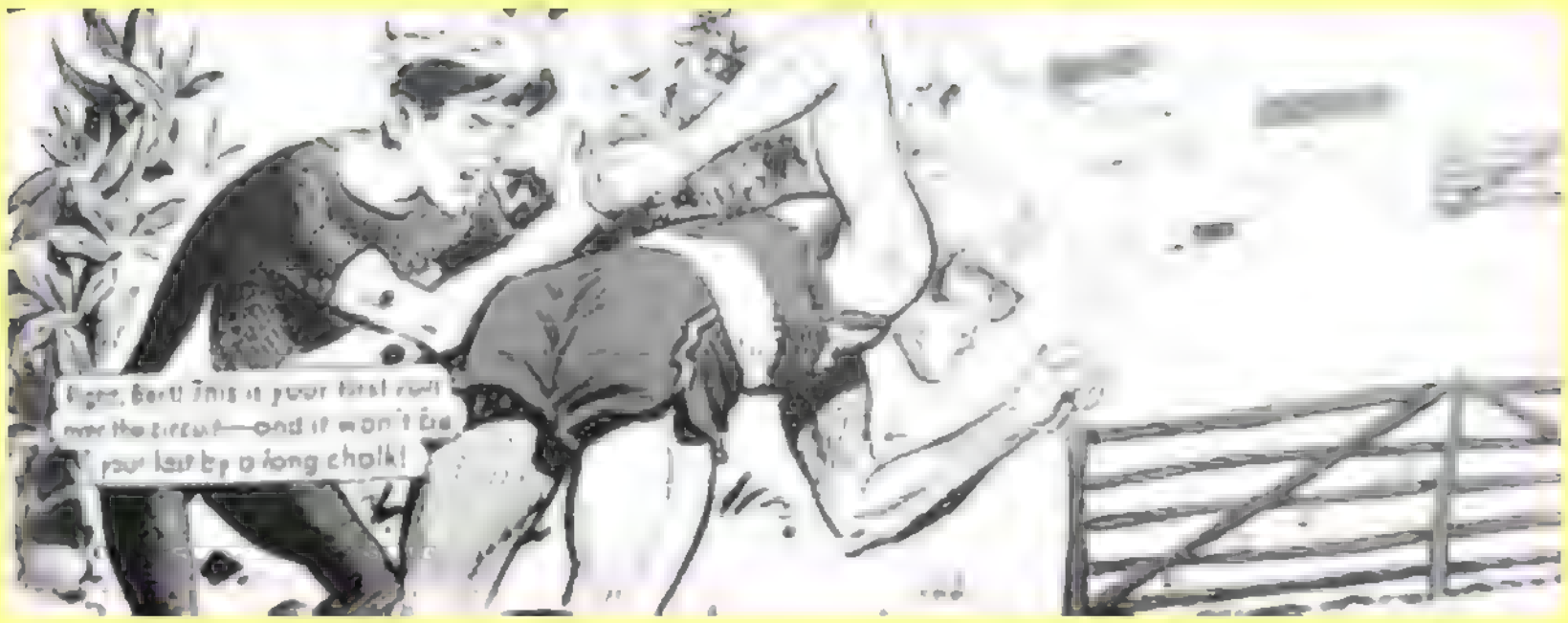
continued the mix of humour and adventure but was very much action focussed. Beginning life in 1933 as a storypaper (text with spot illustrations), this evolved into the comic, *The New Hotspur* in 1959. By the time 1980 had called around, it was again just The Hotspur. Ending in 1981, this was towards the end of it's life, although the annual continued on into 1992.

The cover was spectacular! **X-Bow** (referred to as Crossbow on the cover for some reason), the mysterious motorbike-riding crime-smasher with the variety of bolts for his crossbow weapon came up against the similarly bike-riding Samurai. With bullet-proof armour and a sword capable of cutting through steel, the Bushido warrior was actually the headman of some crooks. Like several of the British superheroes, there was no background to X-Bow. No secret identity or private life. He was simply an action character. That was his whole story.



The other superhero was former comic cover star, **King Cobra**. Bitten by a radioactive snake....no, just kidding. Bill King is a roving reporter but can transform into the super-powered crime-fighter by the pressing of a few hidden buttons to transform his suit. Bill's costume hosts a variety of secret weapons, including a balloon that inflates in his cobra hood. Bill uses this to follow a dragon kite before a variety of confrontations to free a sultan from a rebel magician. Some quite astonishing art from Ron Turner.

The majority of the rest of the comic was comprised of either war or sport. Taking the latter first, sports included football, boxing (**Bernard Briggs**) and even fishing! However, the big sports star was *the Man in Black,* **Wilson the Wonder Athlete**. First appearing in 1941, Wilson was actually an athlete from the 18th Century who, by using physical training and a sparse diet, had managed to disengage from the aging process.



In this feature-length epic, Wilson allows Bert Bond to beat him at the egg-and-spoon race. However, Wilson identified Bert as a potential champion. The bespectacled Bert is taken under Wilson's wing to become a hurdles runner. By following Wilson's lifestyle of simple food and living outside, Bert becomes better. On the day of the race, Bert breaks hid glasses. Wilson tapes brown paper over them, much to the shock of Bert! However, by trusting his training and letting the strides be dictated by muscle memory, Bert takes the tape! Such a fun tale.

The war tales included stories from the World Wars, the

Colonial War in America and the Napoleonic Wars. Plenty of variety, with **The Big Palooka** being the most successful.

Finally, there's **WARLORD FOR BOYS 1980**. Warlord only began in 1974 but was a leader for Seventies comics. The more grim'n'gritty style of story allowed the likes of **Battle, Action** and eventually **2000AD** to prosper. Not that it was adult fiction. It was simply a more up-to-date boys' adventure. However, Warlord was all war action. No comedy. No sports. Not even historical wars. It was virtually all World War II, with the very occasional WWI creeping in.

Beautiful cover by the incredible Ian Kennedy. The first story is the lead for the comic, **Union Jack Jackson**. Jackson is recommended to be upgraded to officer material. His ability in the field convinces the captain that he would be wasted in an office and cancels the commendation...much to the delight of UJJ.

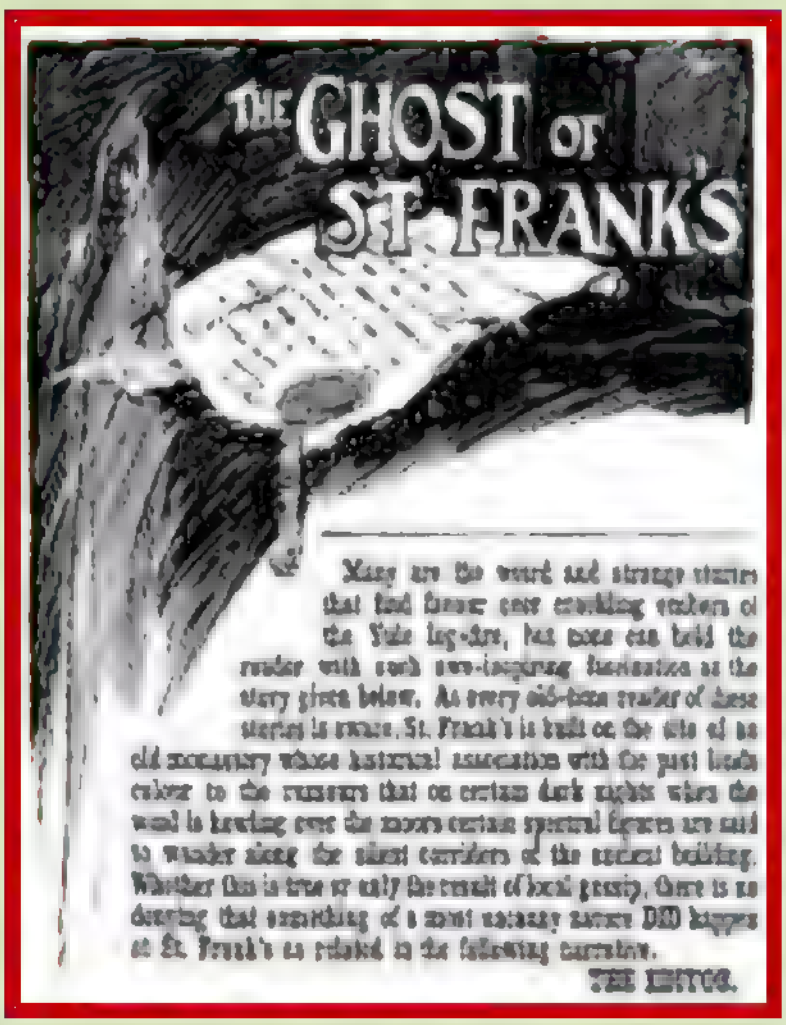
The other prime strip was Peter Flint, **Code-Name Warlord**, the eponymous star and secret agent. In an unusual twist, Warlord had to team up with his deadly German enemy Karl Schafft. Although they make an effective pair, it ends with Schafft promising to try to kill Flint next time they meet.

Although there are plenty more strips, the most unusual and ground-breaking was **Kampfgruppe Falken**. Unusual, in that the stars are fighting for Germany in World War II! A group of former prisoners are punished by forming a battalion to fight against Russin forces in the frozen east. In this, the battalion are captured by Russians and are to be transported to Siberia. However, they manage to break free and defeat the Russians. Turning them over to the Nazis though would mean execution. So, instead, Falken releases them, without their cargo. Whilst doing that, they also turn over a battalion member who tried to switch sides when arrested by the Russians.... only the Russians do not take too kindly to a German turncoat either.

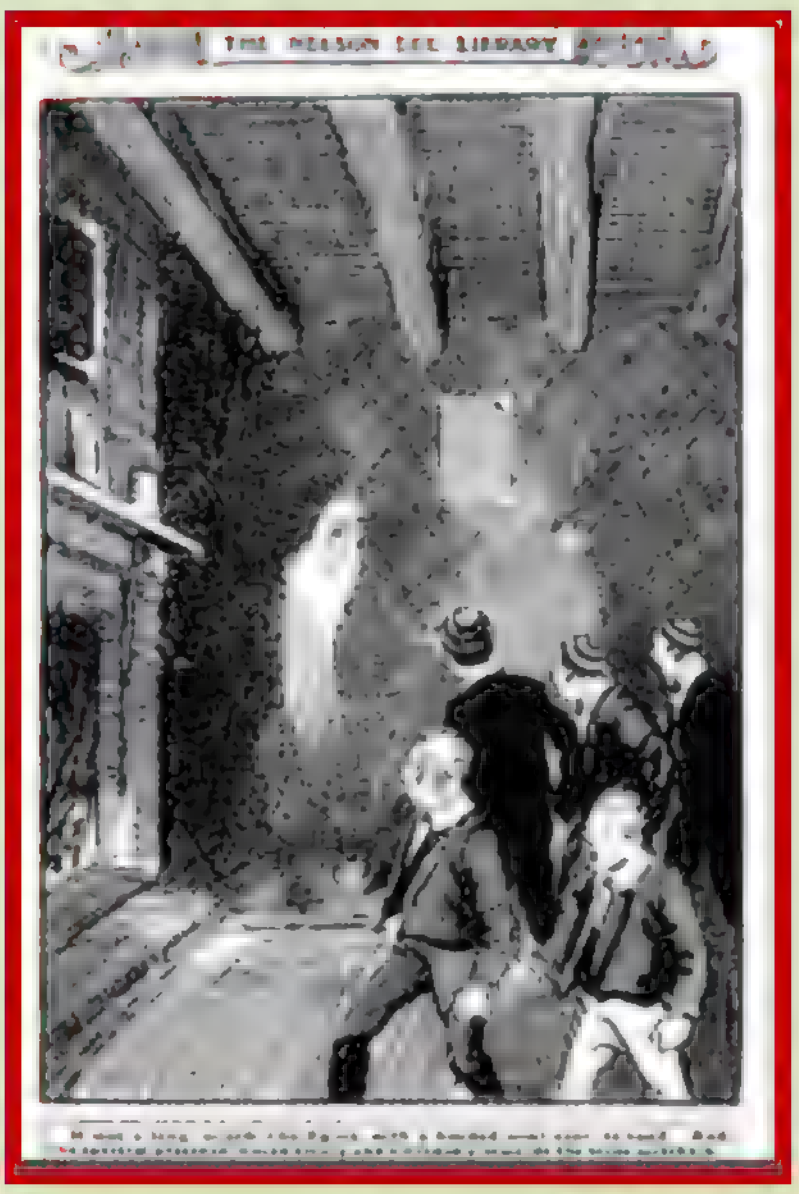
With Warlord, you know what you are getting. All brutal action no-nonsense war. Perhaps not as politically correct as it should be but actually exciting stuff for Xmas Day.

Creepy Christmas Chicanery with Nelson Lee

by Stephen Montgomery



Despite being comic book daft, most Christmases I pick up something a bit different. Story papers. Having had a long time acquaintance with tales of the ridiculous Billy Bunter and the lads of Greyfriars School, the seasonal Christmas mysteries, sometimes spectral spectaculars, seem just right for an innocent chortle or two over mince pies.



However, there is another title whose ghostly goings-on bring me back every year. The boys of St. Frank's School, stars of The Nelson Lee Library, manage to find themselves involved with some sort of phantastic phantasm during the festive frolics. Lacking the humour of the Billy Bunter tales, the St Frank's boys make up for it with weird mysteries and with the help of the great detective, Nelson Lee, always manage to solve the eerie enigma.

Left: The cover of the 1920 Christmas issue of The Nelson Lee Library. From the story – a worrying development!

I can't describe it—I don't exactly know what the feeling was. But I was horrified. The very fact of being in the apartment brought over me a peculiar sense of horror, and an unaccountable feeling of dread. It was like cold hands passing over my forehead and my eyes. It seemed to grip me.

And, at the same time, there was a dank, overpowering smell—earthy and reminiscent of a graveyard. Somehow or other, I felt rooted to the spot—I dared not move another step forward. And I hardly dared move backwards, either.

From 1924:

the mystery begins as the boys search for

"The Ghost of Glenthone Manor.

THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY
The Secret of the Panel!
or, The Yuletide Adventurers.
Another Grand Long Christmas Story of the Boys of St. Frank's and their investigations of the strange ghost mystery at Glenthorne Manor, where they are the guests of Colonel Glenthorne
By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Batman Noel

by Greg

Christmas is a really nostalgic time for me as it is with so many people. Being an expatriate, there are some traditions and routines I can't hold on to so I try to compensate by keeping up with others. One tradition I've developed is reading the stunning graphic novel, Batman Noel by Lee Bermejo.

What raises Noel above the many other Christmas-themed comics and novels is the truly incredible artwork by Bermejo. It's not something I can adequately describe; it has to be seen. The crisp, detailed and gripping panels almost roll off the page, creating an atmosphere and narrative of their own.

At its core, the storyline of Batman Noel artfully reinterprets the classic tale of A Christmas Carol, using beloved DC characters to explore timeless themes of redemption and transformation, accompanied by a (mostly) anonymous narrator. These replacements aren't capricious or shallow however, the motives and emotions of each persona fit naturally, and follow a predictable but satisfying outcome.

It's no wonder to me that Batman Noel remains popular, and I'd recommend it to anyone looking for a good read and visual feast this Yuletide.

At the end of 1994, Alex Ronald wrote and drew his first comic, with the intention of getting noticed by 2000AD. One year later, he was a regular artist for the comic, being the artist for mega-hero Judge Dredd.

RED SANDS is an enthralling tale of colonists, tyrants and anti-heroes set in a futuristic 'gold rush'.

STARSCAPE

www.starscapecomic.co.uk

Memories of Reading Comics at Christmas

by Gavin Porteous

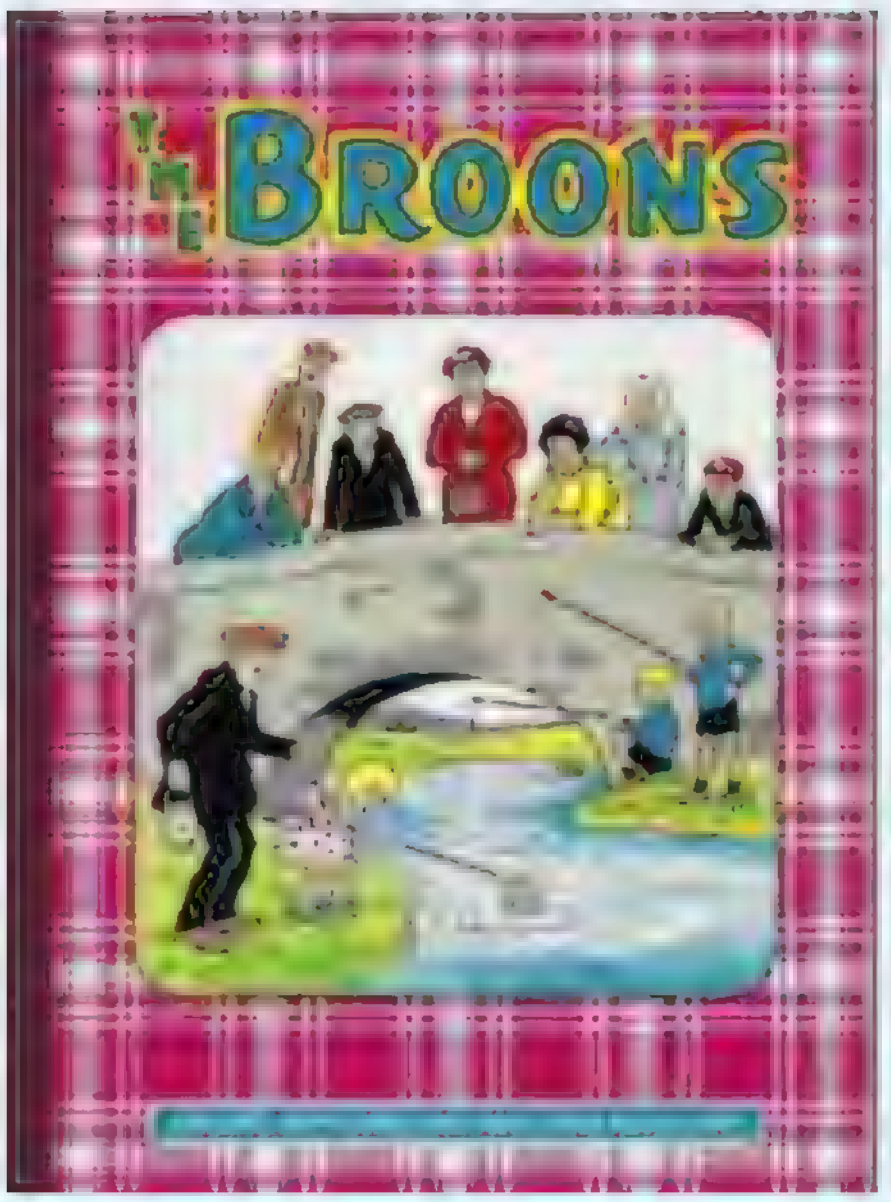
Growing up the youngest, by several years, of three boys my access to DC and Marvel graphic novels, was limited to hand me downs or sneaking them from my brother's rooms when they were out.

In the early 70s my preferences were more likely to be Beano, Dandy, Topper or the TV Comic, these being more suited to my age at the time. The TV Comic always had great strips relating to the shows I would be watching, extending the fun of the shows.

My one prevailing memory from December 1973 was of getting a Christmas themed issue of Topper. School had broken up so I was home and underfoot. My dad worked shifts as a bus driver, and it was a busy time of year. My brothers were older and did their own things and my mum was trying to get everything ready, which meant regular shopping trips, making and icing the Christmas cake, mince pies, etc., and decorating the house.

I remember the radio was on and it was playing hits from that year, the track was one I liked, Blockbuster by The Sweet and to keep me occupied my mum told me to look under the cushions on the sofa, probably under some pretext of finding lost change, and there under the middle cushion, a fresh issue of Topper. Getting something like this just before Christmas was unusual but of course I didn't question the find, just sat down on the floor and devoured the stories, of course being just 6 it took longer than normal to read but had the desired effect of keeping me out of the way for a couple of hours.

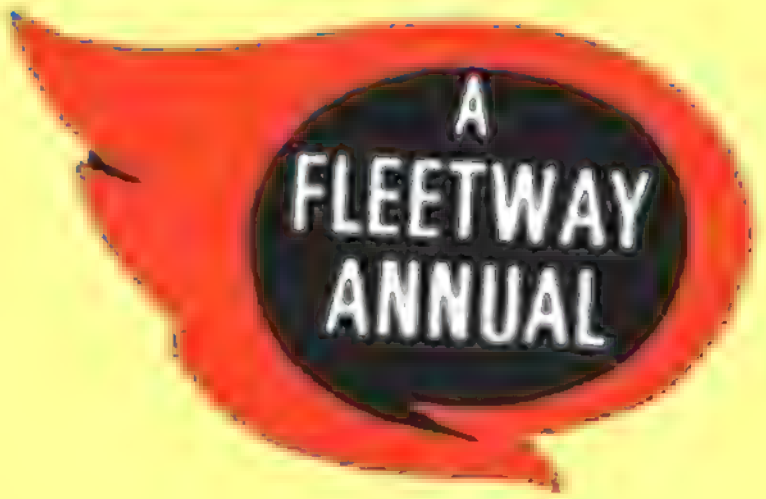
Christmas day always had the bonus of one annual that was a favourite, the Broons or Oor Wullie, which ever was the issue of that year. Once the meal was over and while the grownups watched the Christmas specials on TV, I would sit and read these outlandish adventures cover to cover, trying not to chuckle too loudly.



And here is that very issue of The Christmas Topper, and The Broons Annual from 1969.

A Very 1980 Christmas III

by Chris Smillie



Amalgamated Press IPC Fleetway Egmont – take your pick. For me, they will always be Fleetway. Despite being simply a suburb of London, it had that something about the name.

As AP, Fleetway had a long history of comics and storypapers, having published one of the very first in Comic Cuts – indeed, it's been said we call them comics due to that very title. Two of AP's very first releases, Cuts and Illustrated Chips were released in 1890 and lasted over 60 years and around 3,000 issues! Other notable releases included the Magnet, home of **Billy Bunter**.

In the Sixties, DCT was well-established, but it was Fleetway that transformed the genre with, notably, the **Valiant**. This led to a transformation of other titles, such as **Lion** and **the Eagle** (home of **Dan Dare**). Then in the Seventies, once Warlord had arrived, Fleetway revolutionised the industry with **Battle Picture Weekly** and **Action** (home of **Hook Jaw**, not Superman). Then they moved a further step on with the legendary **2000AD**. With that in mind, let's look at three of their annuals.

VALIANT ANNUAL 1980 was a nod to that revolutionary comic. However, as with so many in this period, the comic had ended a few years ago (1976 in Valiant's case). I'm not

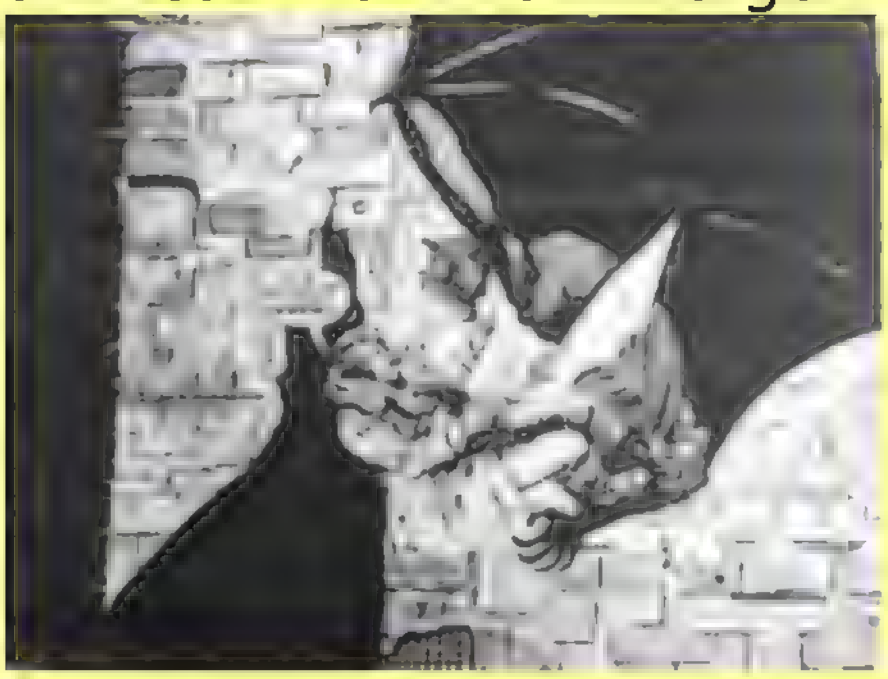
sure who drew the cover (all British comics did not advertise their creators, except 2000AD), but it's gorgeous and full of action. In those days, we would have supported the cowboys of course, whereas now, I'm not so sure…

Like many comics from the Sixties / Seventies, Valiant was an anthology. Action-centred, the stories contained a variety of derring-dos, including sports, war and general adventure. However, there was also plenty of humour in there too, as well as text stories and articles.

For me, the undoubted highlight was the incredible **Adam Eterno**. Valiant had absorbed a variety of comics over the years, and Adam Eterno was one, as he had arrived from **Lion**. Adam was a time-traveller and immortal, save from being struck by gold. Blessed with incredible might and being impervious to harm, Adam was a very strange looking superhero, being dressed in rags, including scruffy cloak. This story, for some reason, is printed on a deep pink paper, which makes it very difficult to read. In this, Adam is transported to the Dark Ages, where he is attacked by wolves. However, Adam is unharmed, but being able to

scare a pack of wolves away leads him to be accused of being part of black sorcery by Baron Draxa. After fleeing from Draxa and his golden arrow, Adam is tended by the hermit, Mageis, who tells of Draxa and the missing heir. After being attacked again by Draxa and his golden arrow, Adam is helped by Drogo – a servant of Draxa. Later, Drogo attacks Adam with supernatural strength by the power of the wolf-amulet around his neck, that is commanded by Draxa. When Adam pulls off the amulet, a birthmark reveals Drogo to be the missing heir. With Draxa now having lost his power and being accused of kidnapping, he rides away with Adam behind him. However, Draxa had forgotten the wolves lying in wait. Draxa reveals the whole plan to Adam as he lies dying. Great stuff! Superb action with a supernatural bent.

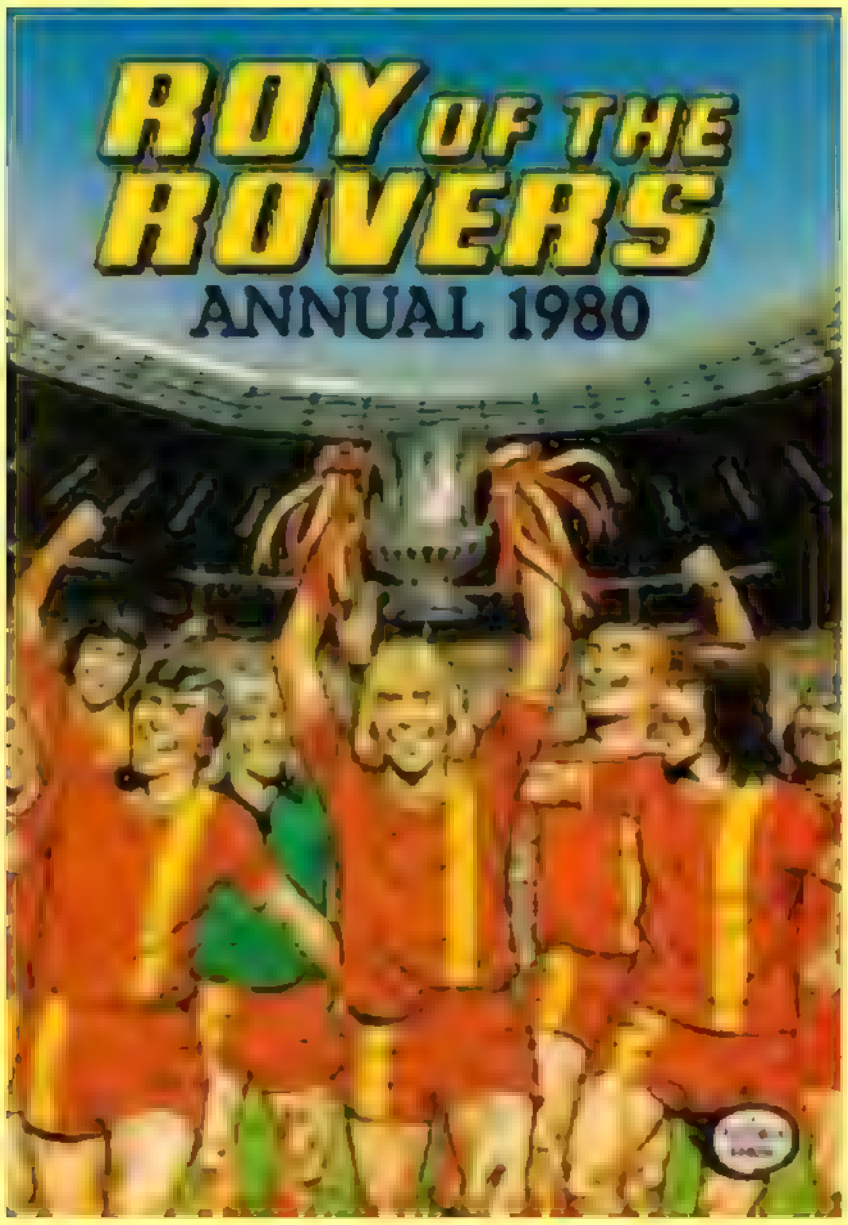
Another supernatural take was **Black Max**, which had arrived from a merger with **Thunder** comic. Baron



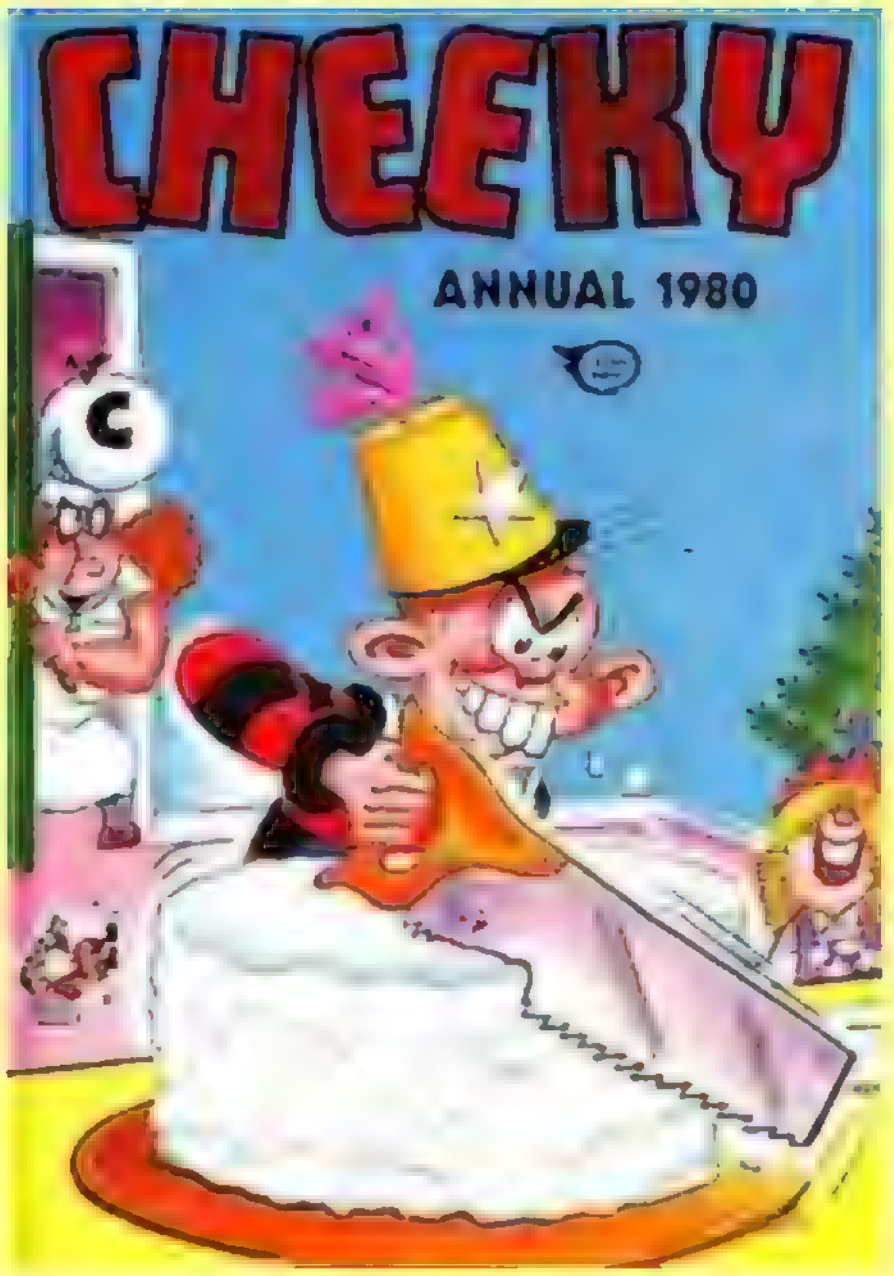
Maximilien - a World War I German pilot – was aided in his battle with the Allies by a troop of giant black bats! In this story, it's not only from the air the British have to fear but also a burrowing machine built by Doctor Gratz. A fearsome twosome, however, Gratz had his own plans. Having betrayed Maximilien, Gratz attempts to escape with his treasure. Nevertheless, Black Max hunts him down, making his burrower surface and bombing it. A ruthless assassin.

The other main character was **Captain Hurricane**. Again, he was captured from a merger. This time from **Hurricane** comic. Cap was part comedy / part action. A force of nature, who would rather beat up Nazis with his fists than tactics or guns. At his side was Maggot – a rather cowardly comedy figure, who was always trying to get away from the

Captain's mad schemes. A good bit of fun. Talking of fun, **Mowser**, the cat to a stately home, and his battles with the butler, James, had several strips. I must admit, I was not a fan.

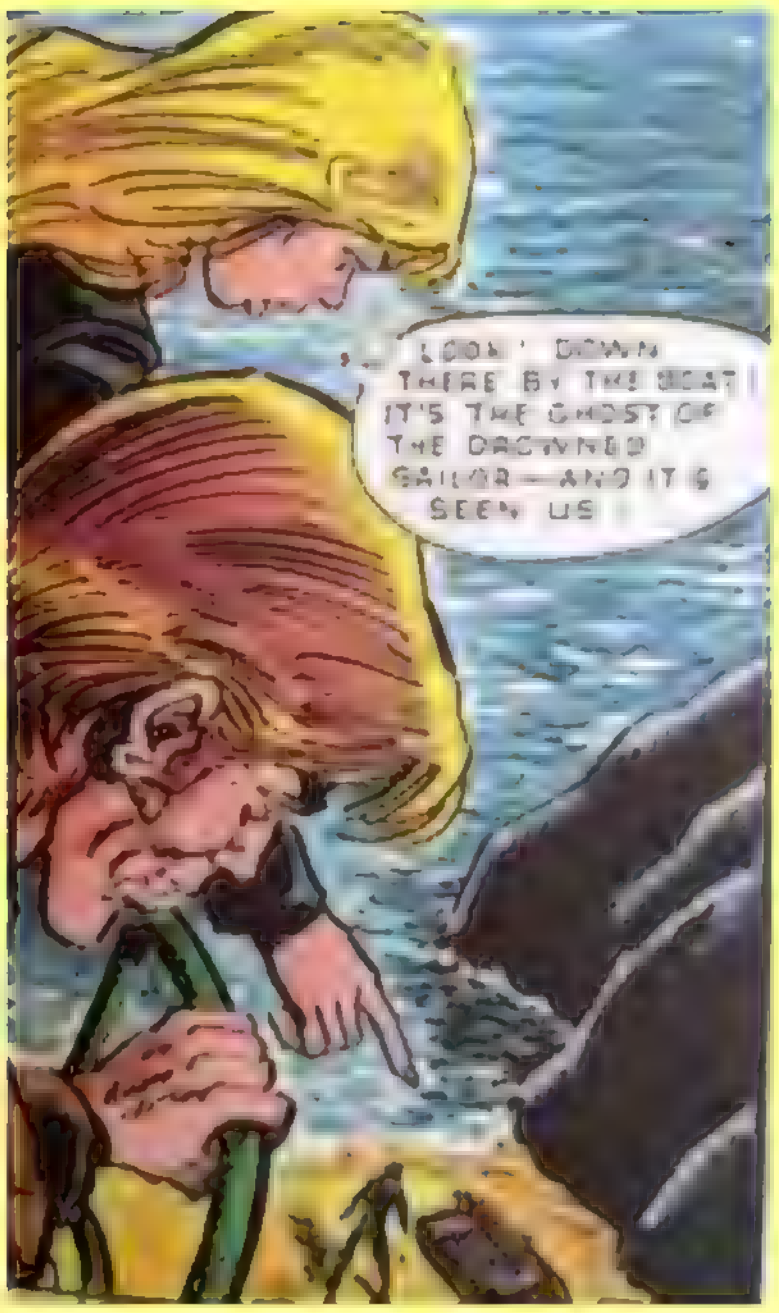


Tiger comic began in 1954 in a similar manner to oh so many comics of the time, including **Lion** from a couple of years earlier. The entire mix of genres was in there. Whilst Lion kept this up, Tiger soon became a sports paper. All sports were featured, including wrestling, car-racing and, of course, football. The cover star of that first issue was Tiger's most famous export and legendary even now, despite his success period being decades ago. Yes, it's the **ROY OF THE ROVERS 1980** Annual. This is pure soccer. Not another sport is even hinted at. Roy gets one new tale at the beginning and another epic, split over two sections telling of Roy's schooldays. Actually, it's just an excuse to reprint some old Tiger stories from bygone days. A couple of the footie stories are a little weird, i.e., the artificially enhanced **Simon's Secret** and the Subbuteo-esque, **Mike's Mini Men**. But basically, it's footie all the way, with plenty of pin-



ups of the stars of the day.

The final Fleetway to look at is **CHEEKY ANNUAL 1980**. I was a huge fan of **Krazy** comic back in the day. The most popular character of the Krazy Gang was Cheeky, who was given his own Cheeky Weekly, ably crafted by the wonderful Frank McDiarmid. The whole comic was pretty much just jokes and little else, featuring a variety of characters that Cheeky had met whilst walking to school.



Set over the course of a week for the comic, the annual featured Cheeky meeting people over the course of the year. I had not been reading the comic at that time, so many of the figures are not familiar to me, but **Ringer Dinger** has several strips. Not a great character, he basically phones up for help a la Ben 10 but never seems to get the right person zapping down his phone in front of him. A full colour strip is **James Bold** – an action tale in the style of Bond. James Bond.

It's a decent annual but not a classic, except for Cheeky. Unfortunately, Cheeky Weekly folded early in 1980, so this was a last gasp for the comic, although the annual lasted for another three years.

So a decent run from Fleetway, if not classics.

Legion of Substitute (Christmas) Covers

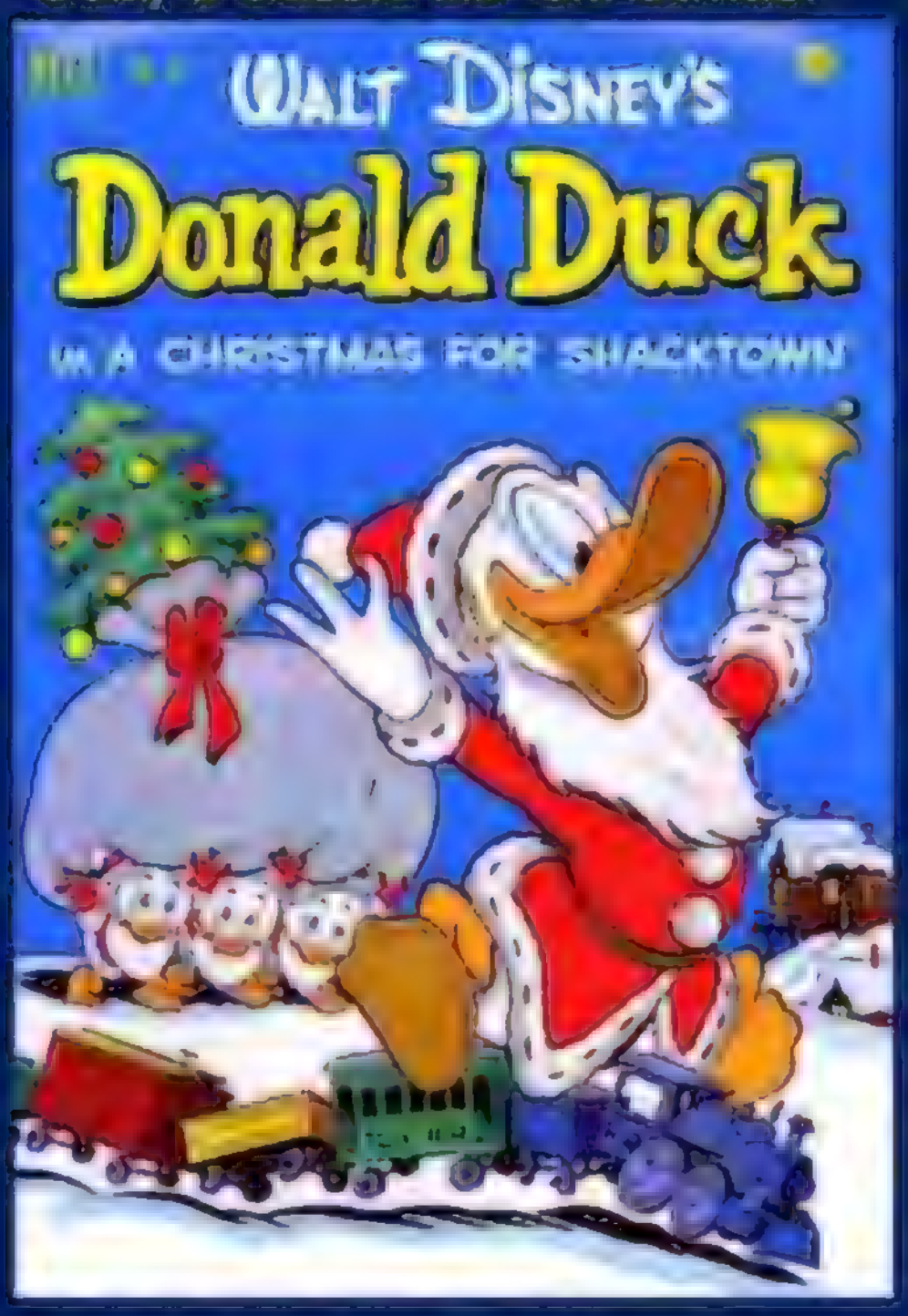
There are a number of blogs where you will find someone's favourite comic book covers and often, for very good reason, the same illustrations pop up in other places. As Christmas covers also feature, we thought as LSH fans, we would show off some of our suggestions in,
The Legion of Substitute Christmas Covers.

Not quite what you were expecting? Well, as most of those blogs feature American comics, we thought we would also include some British, and the occasional non-English offerings.

Brazil, one of their best-known titles.

UK – MM meets Santa.

USA, a classic DD Christmas.



Sweden, Evil Santa v Phantom.

UK, so atmospheric!!!

USA, Cap's Christmas cheer.

Australia, Phantom presents

Brazil, how many can you ID?

Never mind "we", now for some of my favourite pages, headers, panels, cards and story paper covers. This page has no mention of Christmas, but as we approach our winter festival, Mr Eisner certainly evokes that Winter feel. From The Star Ledger, 1950.

THE STAR-LEDGER

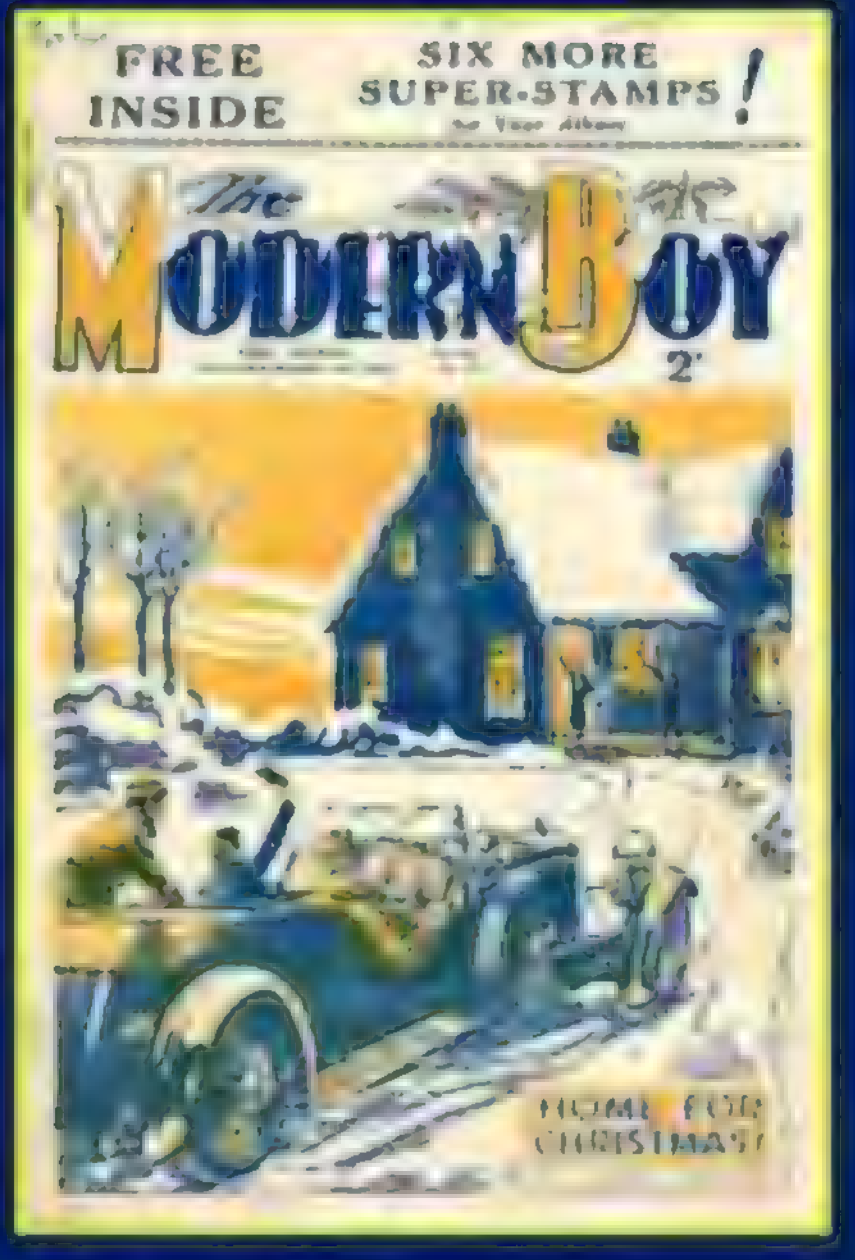
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1950

What a Christmas gift , a hamper of heroes.

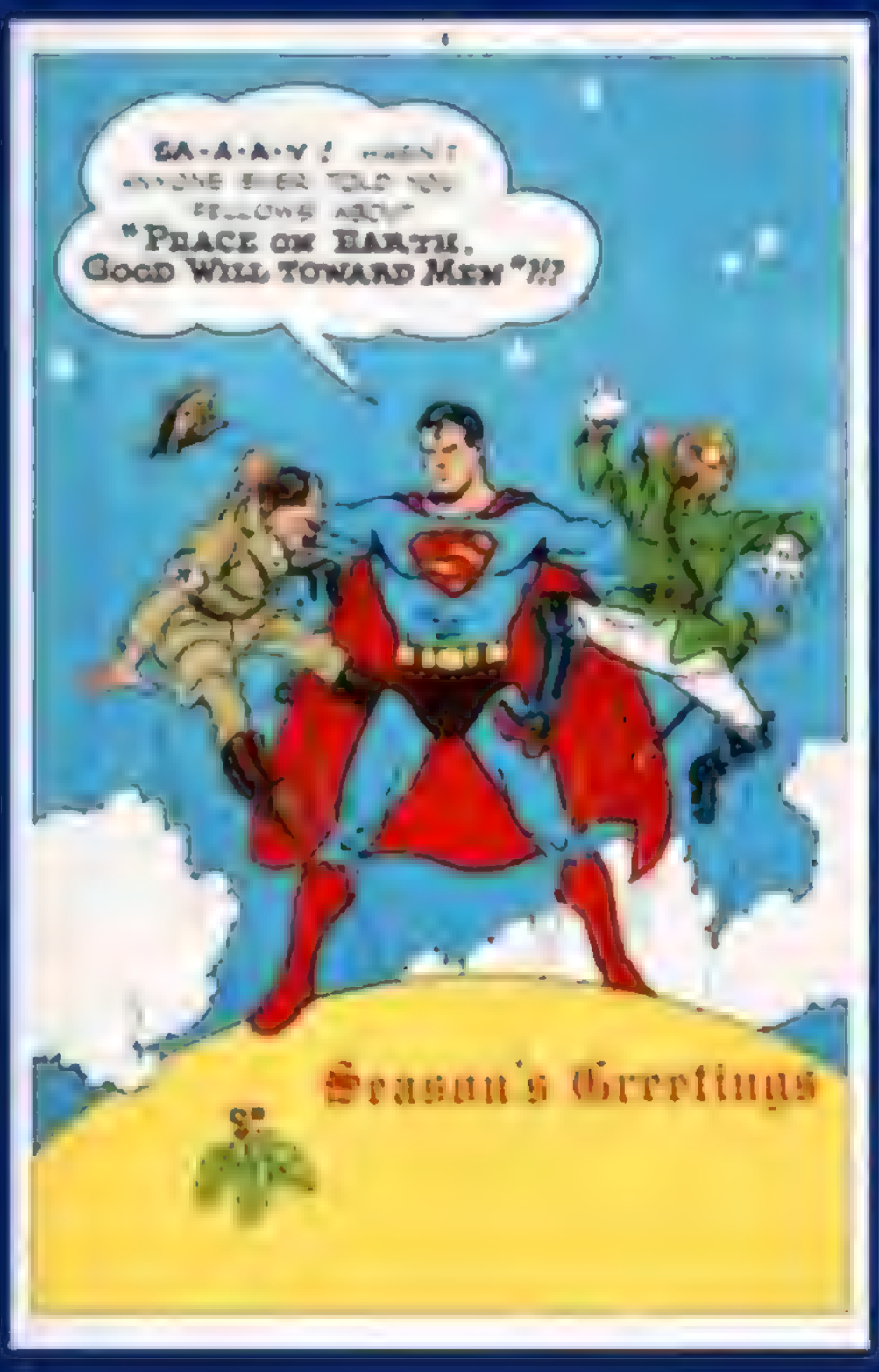
Left: from Belgium, Le Petit Vingtième ran from 1928 – 1940. It was a supplement to the Belgian newspaper, Le Vingtième Siècle. Famous in comic book circles for hosting the original exploits of Tintin, by Herge'. This cover from Christmas 1935 features two other Herge' characters, Quick and Flupke.

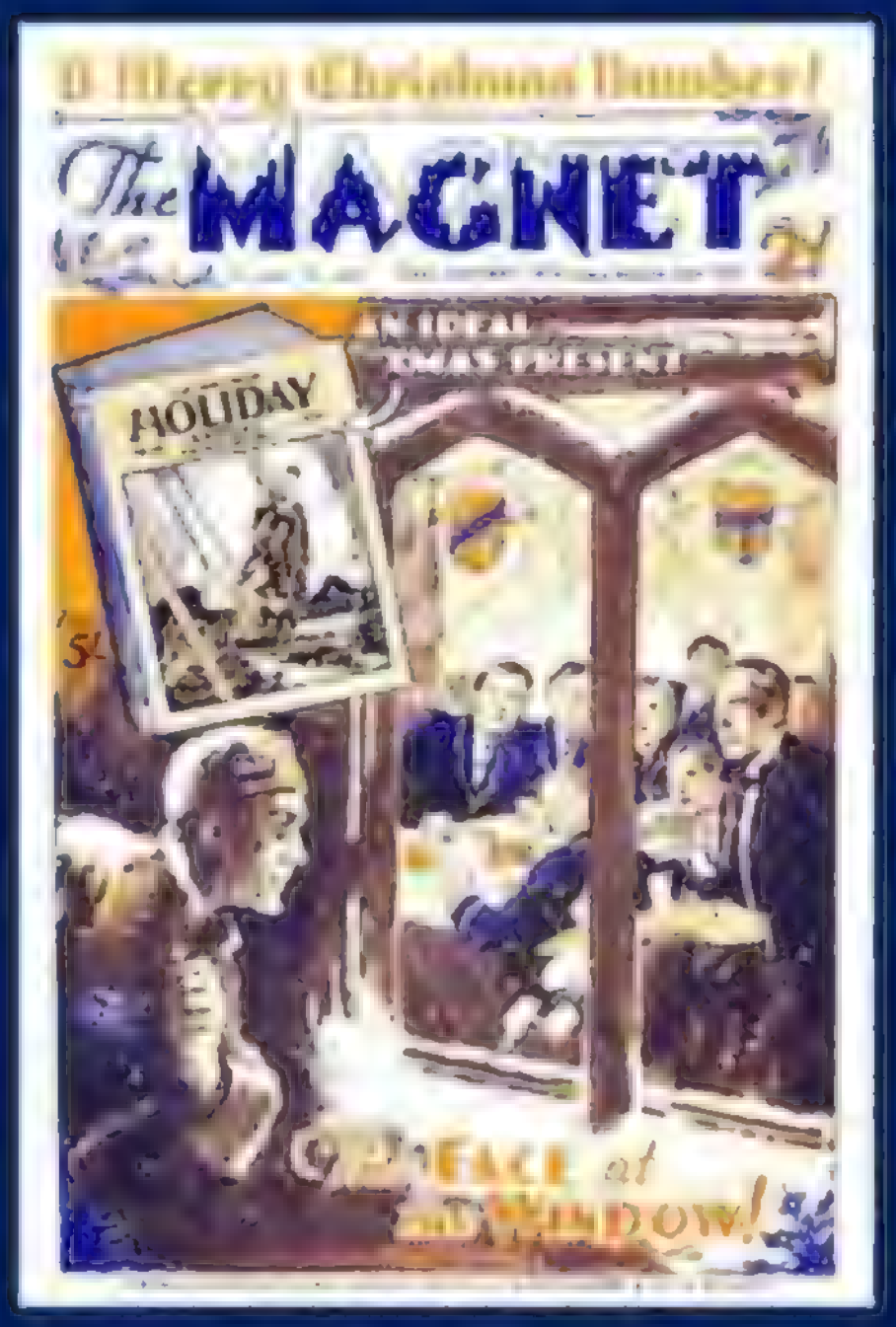
Right: a wonderful illustration by Herge' which appeared as the cover of the 1947 Tintin Journal. Featuring the Thom(p)sons Dupont and Dupond, Captain Haddock, Prof. Tournesol and, of course, Tintin.

Left: cover by S.C. Rowe, 1930. Right: cover unknow n, 1932.

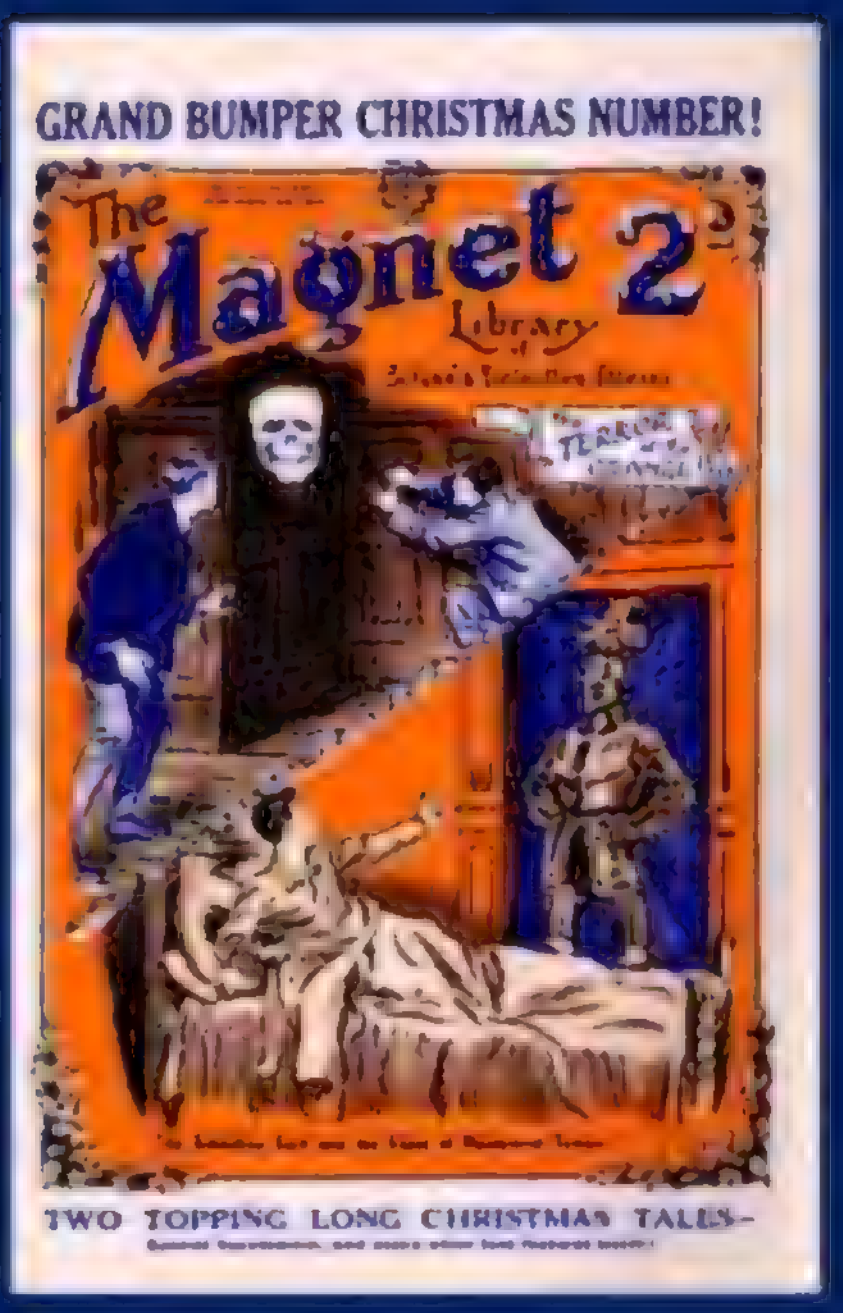


Two greetings' cards designed by Fred Ray.
Right: modified cover of Superman #17 1942.



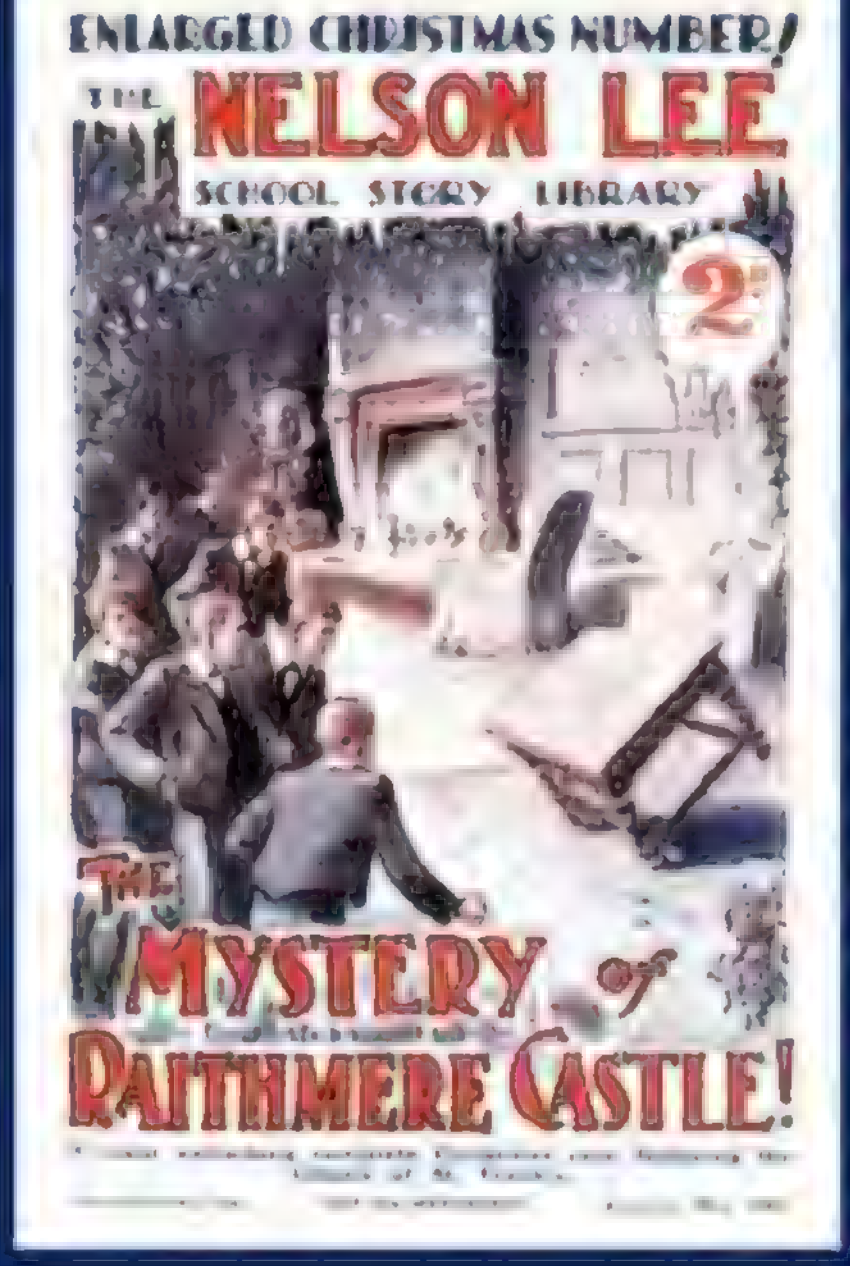


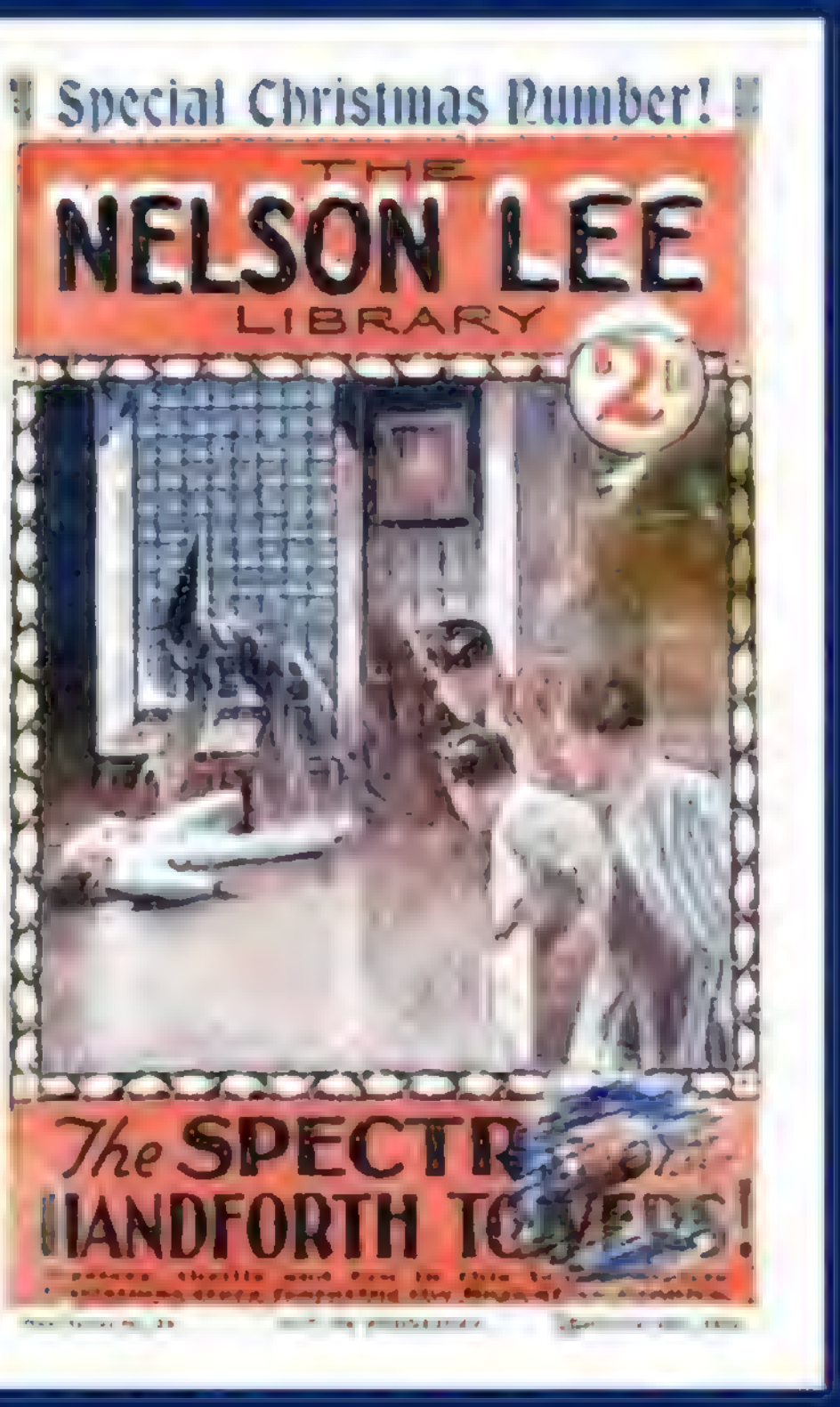
A tradition in British story papers was the special Christmas story which was often a "ghost" story. In the case of The Magnet,



Billy Bunter was often on the receiving end of ghostly goings on. The Gem featured tales of the boys of St. Jim's.

This title was a pocket size story paper and followed the same format – spectral shenanigans at Christmas. It also featured the retired private detective, Nelson Lee (hence the title) who was now a teacher at St Frank's School.





FERRERS LOCKE finds himself up against the strangest and most baffling mystery he has ever encountered. What is the Terror at the Grange? What is the meaning of the appearance of the great white face on the wall?

A Wonderful, Long, Complete Story of a Thrilling Christmas Adventure, introducing FERRERS LOCKE, the Master-Detective, and JACK DRAKE, his young assistant.

Above: the header for a Christmas mystery for the great detective, Ferrers Locke, from The Magnet. Apart from appearing in his own tales, Locke would turn up in Bunter stories also.

Below: yes, it's self-indulgence as I include these two Christmas cards of The Ghost Who Walks and Diana Palmer.

And talking about Christmas cards, another bit of self-indulgence, aka Books and Comics, famous (in its time) palace purveying popular panelogical pamphlets
(is this right? It was tiny and a bit down at heel. Ed)
worked with DC Comics for a few years when the show came to Glasgow. Getting to know DC staff and many of the guests at cons and marts in the city, Christmas cards would arrive. A few have turned up.

A two-sided card. Art by Kyle Baker.

Adapting a lovely piece by Mike Mignola, this arrived from Archie Goodwin., giving all at aka a great deal of pleasure as our time spent with him was such good fun.

Finally, two cards from Mr. Davis, who was always a great supporter of the shop

As we approach Christmas, Greetings from Tales That Astonished, and from these good folk.

Traditionally in Scotland, Hogmanay and New Year were celebrated more than Christmas and with that in mind, The Broons as drawn by Dudley D. Watkins, wish you

"A Guid Year Tae Ain An' A!"

A GUID NEW YEAR TAE ANE AN' A'!
I'M SAE HAPPY, I CANNA' HELP GREETIN'!
OH! IT'S LOVELY HAEIN' YE HAME!
PLAY A' WIR AULD FAVOURITES JOE!
YE SEE! JINGS! I SEE IT A' YE'D GET YE NOO! 'GRAN'PAW A SPECIAL FIRST-GOT THE TELEGRAM SAYIN' THEY WERE COMIN' AN' KEPT IT SECRET!

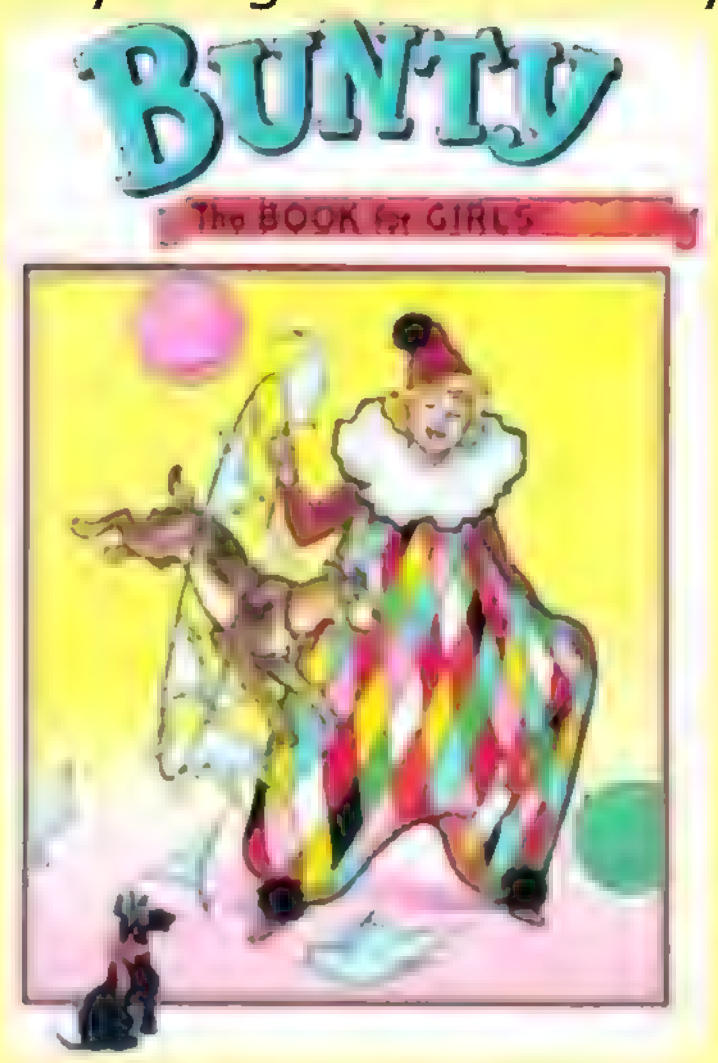
Christmas Comics, a remembrance

(or lack thereof)

by Vince Ranaldi

To be honest I'm not a huge fan of Christmas, the anticipation usually far outweighed the reality. Plus, like Phoebe Cate's Kate in Gremlins, my memories of Christmas's past are somewhat coloured. Having said that I do have some fond "four coloured" memories.

Christmas annuals. A bit of a misnomer as there rarely anything Christmassy in them, but you got them as Christmas presents hence the common name. Back in the mid 60's, when we were oh so young, my brother, sister, and I got a selection of annuals. Usually the Dandy, Beano, Broons or Oor Wullie, and for my sister Bunty or Judy. I recall devouring all of them in short order (I'm my view there was no such thing as Boys and or Girls stories, just good or bad stories), but beyond that no clear memories remain; a bit of fighting over who got what and how dense the Broons and Oor Wullie annuals were compared to the others, cover to cover full page strips.



Christmas themed newspaper strips. Again, no clear memories from my childhood. The Sunday Post and the Edinburgh Evening News were about the only papers I recall seeing as a child. The Sunday Post, a Scottish institution, was home to The Broons and Oor Wullie. From

other papers I have vague recollections of Fred Basset and the Fosdyde Saga, Andy Capp, The Gambols, Garth, The Perishers, Rupert Bear, Garfield, Hagar the Horrible, and many, many more. As the years went by comic strips in newspapers were on the wane. For a while the Metro ran several strips including the excellent Nemi written and drawn by Lise Myhre.

THEY'RE SO PRETTY, I ALMOST WISH THEY WERE ALIVE
AYF
SUGAR-COATED PEOPLE WITH DOUGH FOR BRAINS –
DON'T WE HAVE ENOUGH OF THOSE ALREADY?

So Vince, what Christmas newspaper strips do you recall? Well folks, thanks to the invention of collected strips books I have excellent and oft repeated Christmas themed reading material. The afore mentioned Nemi plus my favourites; Bloom County by Berkeley Breathed and Calvin and Hobbes by Bill Watterson.

Both ran various Christmas themed strip over the years. I particularly enjoy rereading Calvin's dilemma with the existence of Santa and his struggle to stay off the naughty list. Also Christmas adjacent is Calvin and Hobbes Snowmen related strips, sidesplittingly inventive. I really, really want to try and recreate some of his more gruesome snowmen dioramas.

Christmas comics. Ah, now we come into our own. As a rabid to the point of bankruptcy comic reader I have many, many memories of Christmas related comics. I'm sure others will go into them in greater depth than I can do them justice, so I'll confine myself to a few from my favourite comic group, The X-Men. There are loads of X-Men Christmas related stories, so I'm going to linted myself to four, Ok five.

"The Night Before X-Mas" from Marvel's 1994 Holiday Special, by Karl Bollers and Sal Buscema. A slightly odd take on the Twas the Night Before Christmas poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas", with some rather dubious rhyming choices. But what's not to love when it includes a couple of really cool splash pages.

Then there's "Twas the Night Before Christmas" from X-Men #119. More of a straightforward adventure set on Christmas eve it is part of the epic Chris Claremont, John Byrne and Terry Austin run, so what's not to love. Plus, it throws in a reference to my home town. A visit to Edinburgh, what could possibly go

wrong?! Well, nothing till they return in #128.

ANYWAY, THIS IS MY PLAN.
WE'LL SPEND A FEW DAYS IN EDINBURGH, SEE THE SIGHTS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS.
.. HEAR JEAN'S TALES OF HER WILD-AN'-WOOLY WEEKS IN THE AEGEAN, THEN HEAD NORTH FOR MUIR ISLE.

Another Twas the Night titled story come in "'Twas the Night" from Uncanny X-Men #230. In this issue it's Chris Claremont with Marc Silvestri and Joe Rubinstein. The X-Men come across items that the Reavers had stolen. Using Longshsot's power, when he touches an item he can see the history of the item, the X-men decide to return them to their previous owners. As the story takes place on Christmas Eve the X-men in effect play Santa, or maybe Santa's Little Helpers in their case.

It also weaves in a nice interaction between Rogue and Gateway in the closing page. Whole story brings a tear to my eyes (yes I'm cynical, not heartless)

My favourite and probably the best remembered X-Men story is "Demon" Uncanny X-Men #143. This one's by John Byrne, Chris Claremont and Terry Austin, though sadly this was John Byrne's final issue of X-Men as their regular artist. The X-Men leave Kitty alone in the mansion as they go about their various Christmas plans. She is then terrorised by a demon, so basically Home Alone vs Alien starring Kitty Pride. The story and art are excellent as to be expected.

My final shout out is the Chris Claremont and Alan Davis "The Merry X-Men Holiday Special" 2018, "Twenty-five holiday tales of merry mutants, one for each day of December 1 through December 25!". An advent calendar's worth of X-Men stories!

happy Christmas to all, and to all a Good Night!!

P.OLICE C.OMICS 49

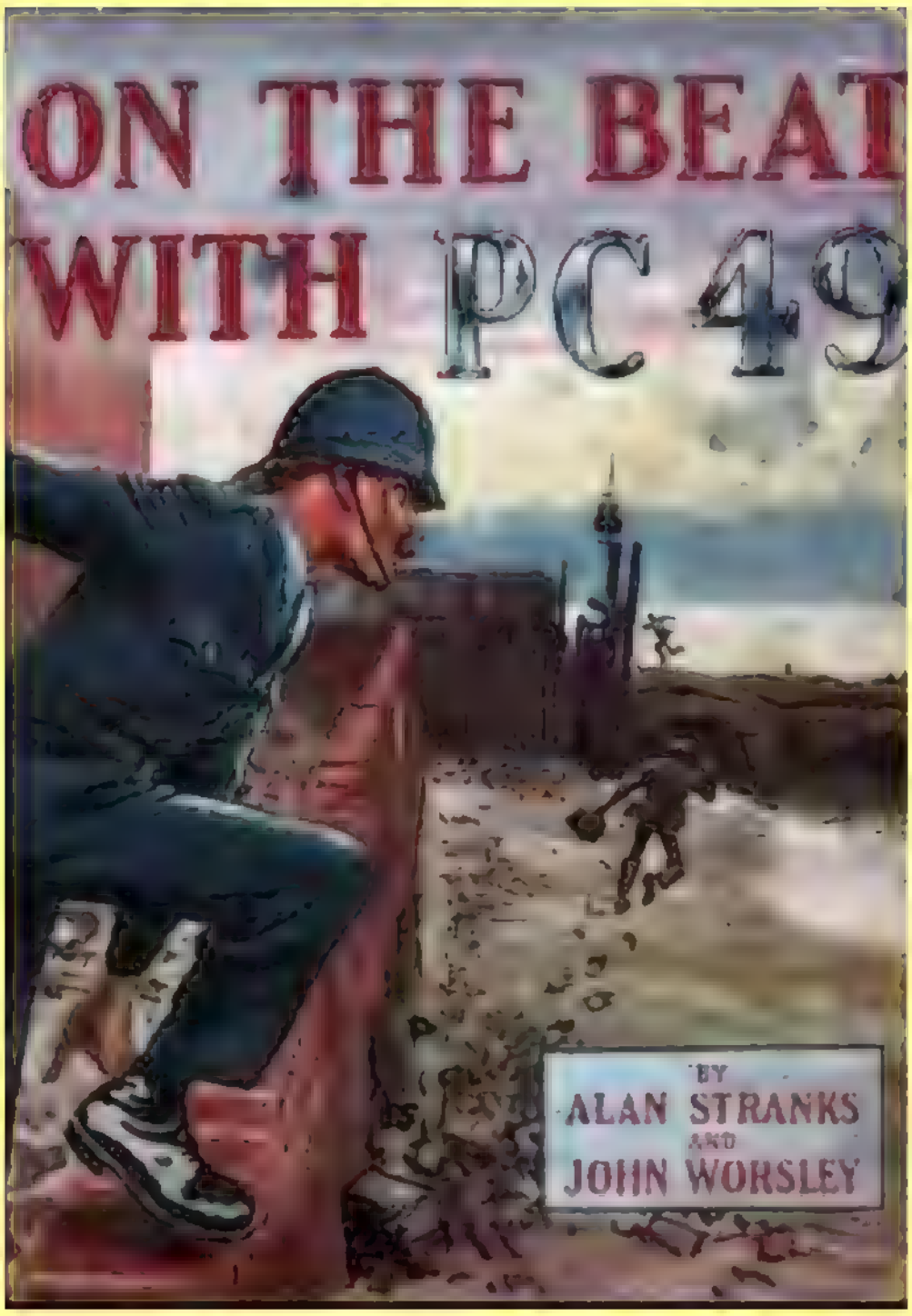
by Steve Montgomery

ARCHIBALD BERKELEY-WILLOUGHBY.

A REGULAR, EVERDAY, GOOD HEARTED POLICE CONSTABLE, WHOSE COURAGE, NOSE FOR DANGER and CLUMSINESS OFTEN LEADS HIM INTO TROUBLE.

His comic book adventures were featured in Eagle and ran from 1950 to 1957. The excellent stories were penned by Alan Stranks. Strom Gould was the first artist to depict PC49 on the comic book page.

Gould provided the pencils till August 1951 when the "good artist", John Worsley, took over. Gould's work was perfectly acceptable and improved as he got to grips with the radio idea and he has to be remembered for succeeding in bringing a vision of PC49 and his world to the comic book page. During his tenure he was never credited on the strips although he signed



some panels. Worsley, at the start of his run was not credited either, but many readers referred to him as the "good artist". Whichever artist was in charge, the stories were of a high quality as our Metropolitan Police "Q" Division "bobby" (policeman) walked his beat.

PC49's world is populated with a long-standing girlfriend, a boys club, some memorably nasty villains and a sergeant to fall foul of.

The idea of an adventure strip based around a lowly police constable was innovative. Here was no private dick; no detective inspector; no upper class, wealthy, privileged, well connected amateur detective. Simply a young PC, one of thousands.

And despite my starting with the superb comic strip version, it all stemmed from a radio show.

The Adventures of PC.49 burst upon an unsuspecting audience on the BBC's Light Programme in 1947.

The radio show quickly became a must listen, so much so that a film for cinema release was made by Hammer films – The Adventures of PC.49 (subtitled, Investigating The Case Of The Guardian Angel) and starring Hugh Latimer as PC.49 with Patricia Cutts as girlfriend Joan Carr. Opening in cinemas in 1949 as a second feature, a "B" film, it's currently available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H90fFhN_Ils

Following the reasonable success of Guardian Angel, a second movie was made, A Case For PC49, which opened in cinemas in August 1951, again as a "B" film. This time though, the part of 49 was played by Brian Reece, whose voice was that of Archibald Berkeley-Willoughby in the long running radio series.

It's also currently available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PmNPiYRaxE4&list=PLwygboCFkeeCe_OCmasvmKrttl2mNXQ6A

While these films are not "The Big Sleep", they are enjoyable with a mix of crime, nasty bad guys, attempts at humour – which is unlikely to travel well, nor appeal to younger viewers – and a certain goodness at the heart of them.

And then there's the place it all started, on radio. Some surviving episodes are available on You Tube: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9lASOUoWF1096XUVmwsBZlCQw1RR4OdG

A couple more are on Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/adventures-of-pc-49.

The radio show gave the audience a few very memorable catch phrases. Archie often exclaims, "My Sunday Helmet" and "My Giddy Aunt" but one which really stuck with listeners, and later, readers, was uttered regularly by the sergeant when telling 49 to get out into the cold, dark night, " Out You Go, 49".

Team-ups??? None of them back then!!!

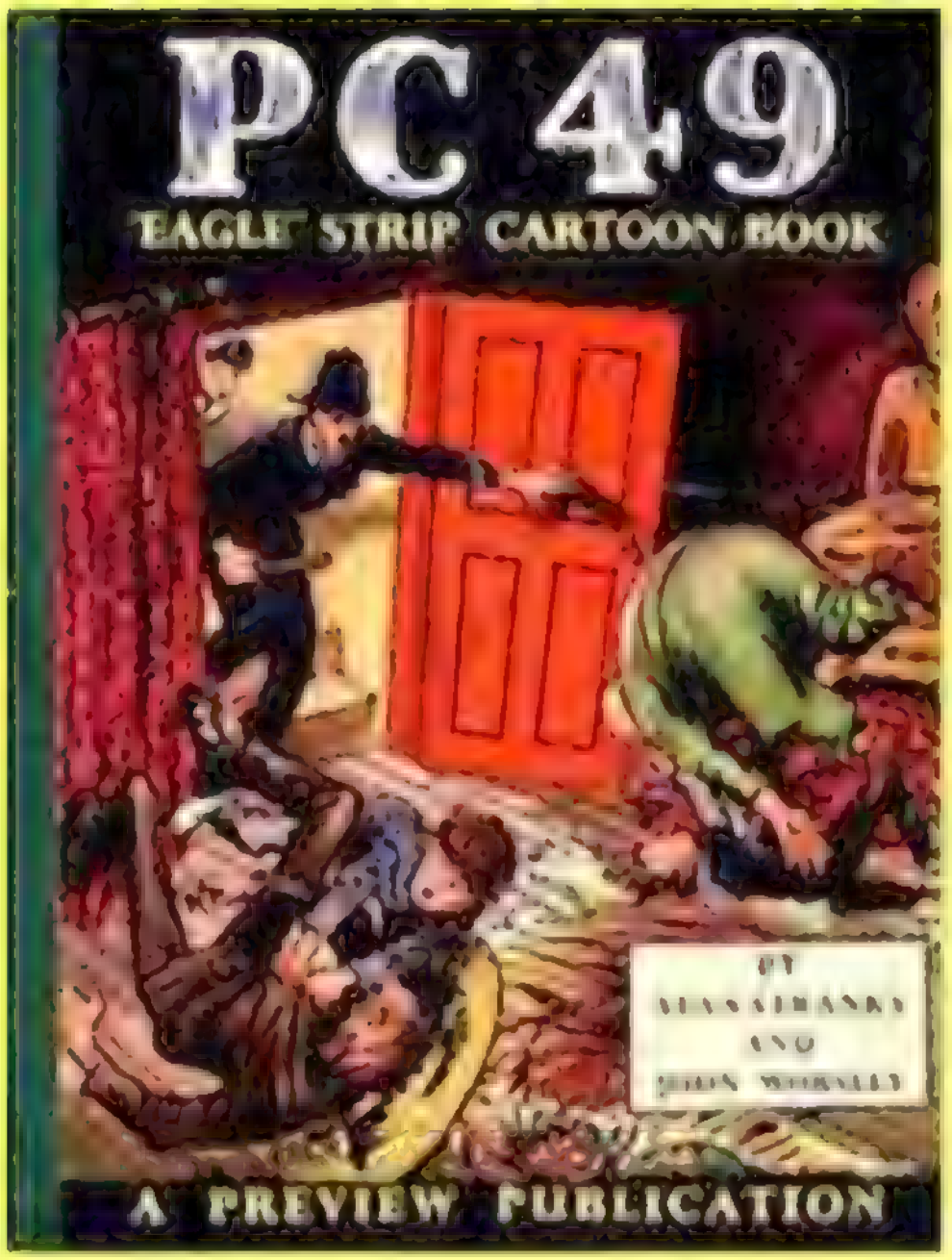
Where did that come from, I hear you ask. 1949, in fact.

In a BBC radio Christmas Special from 1949, just six months before the start of the comic strip in Eagle, PC49 shared an adventure with no less popular radio characters Dick Barton – Special Agent, and Steve, glamorous cocktail connoisseur, inveterate trouble finder and occasional kidnap victim wife of radio detective Paul Temple. The episode appears not to exist now, which is a crying shame.

And so to the comics.

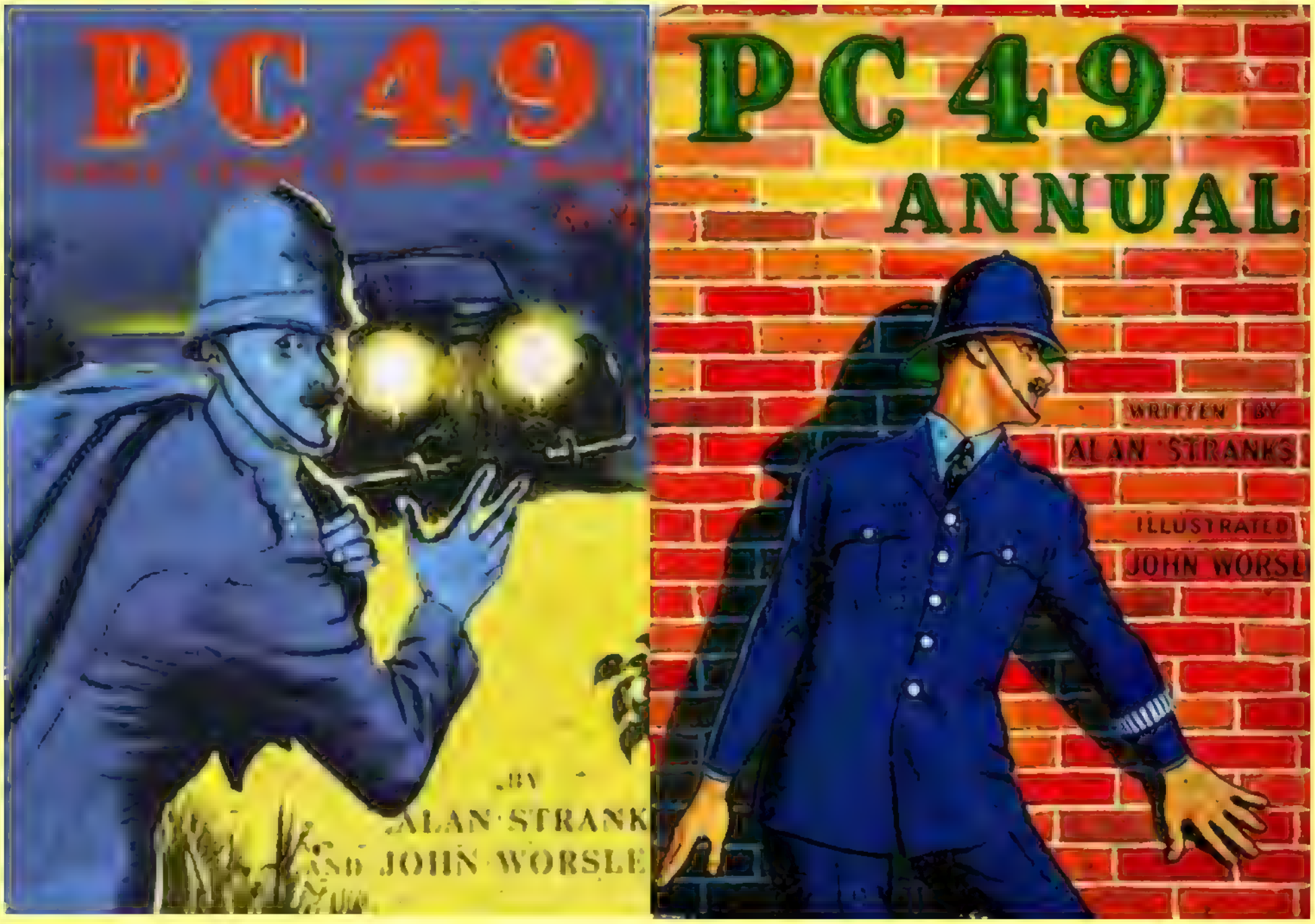
The strip ran for 7 years, appearing weekly in Eagle, in Eagle Annuals, and in his own hardback Annuals which contained illustrated prose yarns and some superb colour plates to pore over. Not all By John Worsley. F.G. Moorsom provided the plates and illustrations for the stories in the 1951 Annual, titled simply "PC49", and the 1952 book, "On Duty With PC49. These books also contained two text strips of two pages each which I believe were also drawn by Mr. Moorsom.

There were four Annuals plus two Eagle Strip Cartoon Books.



One art oddity. A four-page story, "The Case of The Star Pupil" was drawn by Alfred Sindall.

Two exciting panels from the story below, "The Case of The Terrible Twins", as 49 throws caution to the wind to save two young lads from dangerous villains.



Bottom Right; Archie in danger as he tackles the armed brute, Boomer. From the 1955 Annual.

Alan Stranks came up with some really nasty villains. In the story, "The Case of Killer's Keep" We meet no less than mad scientist, DR. DOOM.

This episode also included the charming character wielding an evil looking spiky mace thing. Both on the next page, as brought to life by Strom Gould.

Bottom: as Archibald Berkeley-Willoughby walks a lonely beat, he comes across the lorry driver, victim of a gang of thieves.

Art by John Worsley, who could invest panels with atmosphere, while also imbuing stories with humour and action. From "The Case of The Looted Lorries".

49 is regularly knocked on the head, tied up, shot at, belted by some

great lummox's fist, but good always prevails in these exciting, good fun, humorous adventures. Seek them out.

As the newsboy looked P.C. Forty-nine flung himself to the right

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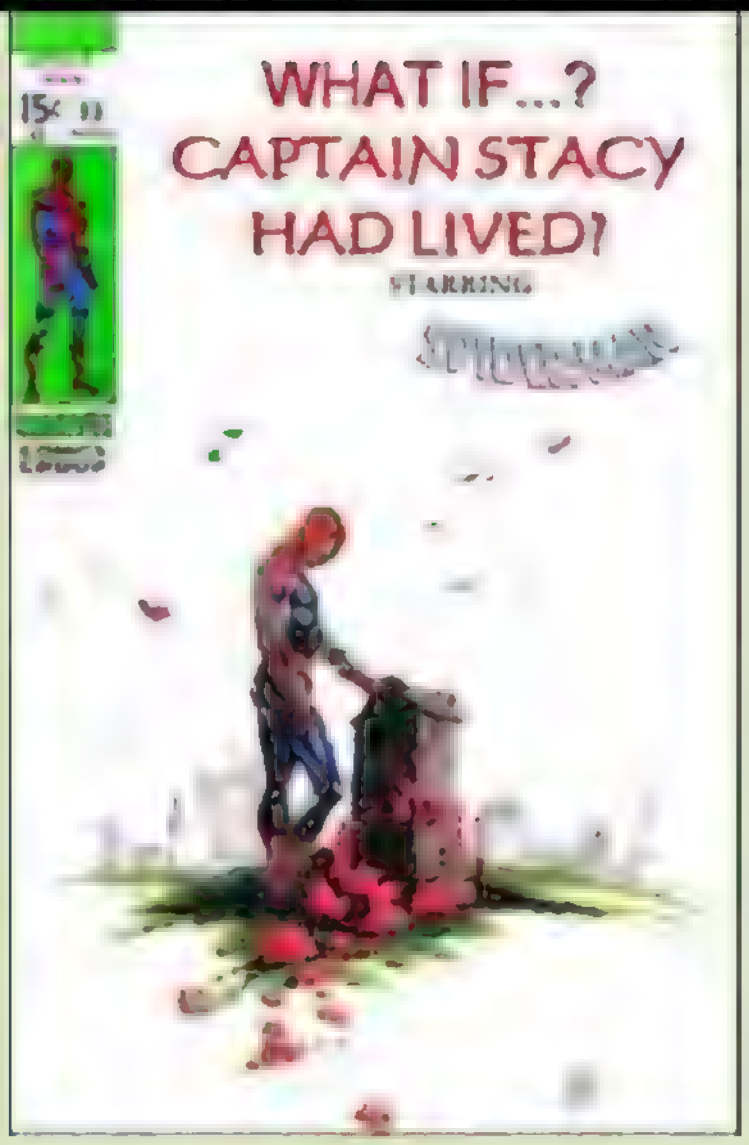


WHAT IF...?

Spider-Man:

Captain Stacy had lived?

The death of Captain George Stacy, father of Gwen, marked the beginning of the blackest period in Spider-Man's life. But what if, by some strange quirk of fate, Stacy had not perished? What if Captain Stacy had lived? .

Silver Surfer versus World's Finest: Superman & Batman

In an attempt to escape the barrier erected by Galactus around Earth, the Silver Surfer breaks through an inter-dimensional rift to the DC Universe. Such an outpouring of energy, however, does not go unnoticed by this World's Finest heroes!

THE version of the John Masefield story, made as a six part serial for television, is one of the very few TV treats I return to every Christmas. My favourite Doctor, Patrick Troughton , plays the part of the kindly, hundreds of years old, mysterious traveller, Cole Hawlings, which makes the whole thing even better. Add to that a superbly nasty villain in Abner Brown, the flight to Tatchester Cathedral, and all sorts of fantastical excitements. The Box of Delights is on TV this Christmas. If you can't access it outwith the UK, search out the DVD. It really is very, very good.

Abner Brown summons something not of this world. And Kay meets Cole Hawlings.

A Very 1980 Christmas IV

by Chris Smillie

Marvel UK did not actually exist then. Well, no-one called it that. It was simply British Marvel. Glossy covered weeklies to reprint US Marvel strips. However, in 1979, Dez Skinn announced the Marvel Revolution. As well as changing comics to emulate the Fleetway / DC Thomson weeklies, he also commissioned new stories and launched **Dr Who** weekly.

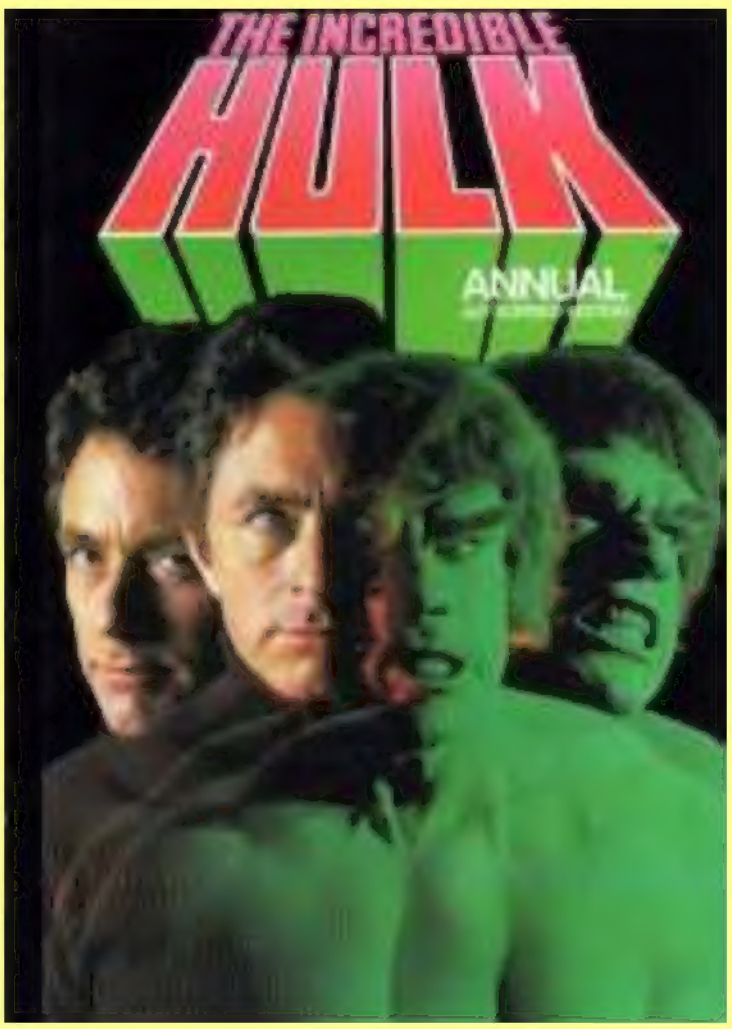
Strangely enough, the first annual to review is actually a throwback to a title that had folder several years ago: **The SUPERHEROES ANNUAL**. Originally, the Superheroes comic featured the **Silver Surfer** and **original X-Men** in 1975 but ended just after a year when these were replaced by the mediocre strips of **the Scarecrow, the Cat, Giant-Man, Doc Savage** and others. Instead the annual featured the

Surfer once again in a reprint from his US comic (indeed, all the strips are reprints), where he comes up against old Hulk foe, the Abomination. Elsewhere, the **Mighty Thor** faces off against Harokin the Barbarian, in search of Odin in the land of Hela. Great Buscema art in an all-action tale from Le Wein.

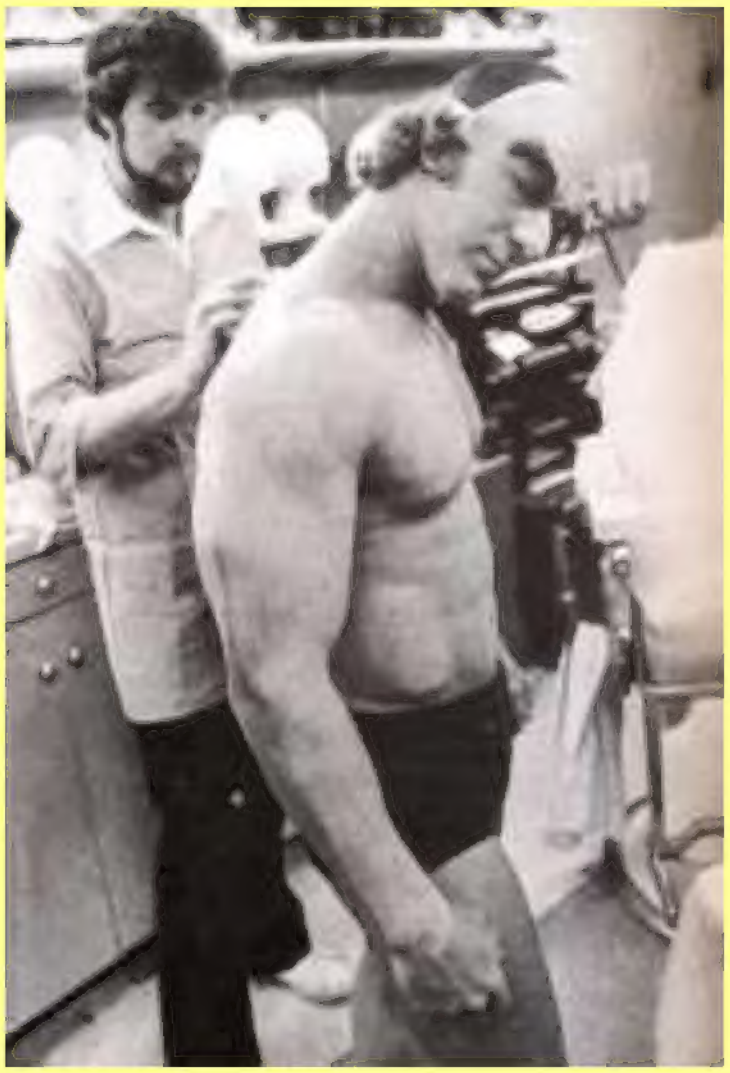
BUT, EVEN AS PROUD NEHOBET SPEAKS, HIS LONELY FUTURE SEEMS BRIGHTER FAR THAN THAT OF THE OUTER WORLD... AS AN AWESOME, TIME-TORN FLOTILLA STREAMS FORTH INTO THE LIGHT OF DAY...!
HAH! I DON'T EVEN NEED TO USE GERM WARFARE AGAINST THE LAND-CRAWLERS!
HOW CAN THEY HOPE TO STOP THE PHANTOM FLEET OF TIGER SHARK?
HOW DO YOU FIGHT--AN ARMADA OF IMMORTALS??

In a fantastic ghostly tale, Tiger Shark attempts to lead a selection of haunted ancient ships against **Sub-Mariner**, in a Roy Thomas / Marie Severin tale.

Wonderful annual, featuring three of my favourite heroes…even though only one actually appeared in the comic!



At that time the Incredible Hulk TV series was the biggest thing around and Marvel was taking advantage. Hulk Comic had just been launched, featuring a mix of original and reprint strips. Not only of the Jade Giant, but a selection of relatively short strips, of which the outstanding one was a wonderful



Captain Britain / Dark Knight strip. So, I shall review the **INCREDIBLE HULK ANNUAL AUTHORISED EDITION**. This featured three all-new UK originated strips, which featured a Hulk more like the TV series. There are also text stories and some behind-the-scenes guides to the show. And that was what this annual was about. It was not actually printed by Marvel but by Grandreams.

The **SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL 1980** reprinted the wonderful story of Stegron the Dinosaur Man versus the Reptile, alongside a couple of original text stories. Better than the Hulk Annual, which needed a couple of years until Marvel could begin putting out the comic Hulk, and not the TV Hulk, I was a big fan of the War of the Reptile-Men, which had been reprinted not so long ago in the weekly **Super Spider-Man and Captain Britain**.

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